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POCKET NOVELS



Silver Rifle, the Girl Trailer



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BEADLE

SILVER RIFLE,

THE GIRL TRAILER;

OR,

THE WHITE TIGERS OF LAKE SUPERIOR.

BY CAPTAIN CHARLES HOWARD.

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

No. 45. THE ELK KING.		No. 60. MERCILESS MAT.
No. 50. THE WOLF QUEEN.		No. 64. THE ISLAND TRAPPER
No. 52. THE MAD CHIEF.		No. 69. YELLOW HUNTER.

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SILVER RIFLE,**THE GIRL TRAILER.****CHAPTER I.****AHDEEK, THE HALF-BREED.**

IN the center of a thickly-wooded dell, situated about three miles from the southern shore of Lake Superior, a half-breed youth, clad in the habiliments of a Chippewa Indian, *discussed* a frugal meal. The sun was sinking behind the wonderful Chapel Rocks, and his last beams, stretching through the festooned forests, fell upon and clothed the half-breed in golden light.

His features were clear-cut and regular, his body lithe but well-knit, and a tender expression beamed from the blackest of eyes. A long-barreled rifle rested on his foot, his mink-skin cap surmounted the stock, and on the index finger of his left hand there was a gold ring of singular workmanship, surmounted with a single brilliant.

He was so absorbed in the discussion of his repast, that he grew oblivious to his surroundings, until he put his hands into his pemmican bag, and discovered that his stock of that edible was exhausted.

"Pemmican all gone!" he ejaculated, with a smile. "Ahdeek go, too, now, he and Nahma not meet for three moons. Nahma promised to be in big cave when Ahdeek come back, and Ahdeek much to tell him."

The youth slowly rose to his feet, picking up his rifle as he executed the movement.

"Sun nearly gone to sleep," he murmured, glancing toward the west. "Soon he sink to the fishes of Gitche Gume.*

* The Indian name for Lake Superior—signifying "big sea water."

A moment longer the half-breed lingered. Then he started toward the lake, but with a single stride he came to a halt, and the click, click of a well oiled rifle-lock followed the lifting of his rifle from a "trail."

A suspicious sound had arrested his steps, and, as he leaned forward, and with shaded eyes tried to penetrate the forest directly before him, the sharp report of a rifle changed the scene.

The half-breed recoiled with a quick ejaculation of surprise, and his own weapon dropped to the ground—the lock knocked out of time by the unseen enemy's bullet.

"Who shoot?" cried the youth, as he sprung to his trusty gun, and snatched it from the ground.

His exclamation was answered by terrific yells, and as he sprung erect with the crippled rifle clubbed, he found a dozen savages rushing upon him.

He did not speak, but faced the dusky demons with tomahawk in one hand, the rifle in the other. He saw at once that his enemies desired to take him alive, for they could have cleft his heart with a dozen balls while he walked leisurely beneath the tree vines.

"The Chippewas have caged the Tiger!" cried the leader of the Indians, a prepossessing young brave, who had won distinction and his eagle-feathers quite early in life. "They have trailed him long; they have watched for him in the caves of Gitche Gumee; they have followed him through the great wood. Now let him be a man, and surrender when he sees that he can not escape."

The chief spoke in the language of his nation, and a smile wreathed the lips of the noble quarry, who, a moment after the chief had finished, threw rifle, knife and tomahawk on the ground in token of surrender.

Then he folded his half-naked arms, and surveyed the savages who sprung forward elate with long-sought triumph.

"The White Tiger is a true brave," said the red leader, as he reached a spot within ten feet of the youth. "He knows when—"

"Ki-o-ee-chee!"

The yell pealed from the throat of the half-breed, and

while yet it quivered his lips, he was among his dusky enemies, scattering them like chaff with the butt of his rifle!

The Chippewas recoiled before the impetuosity of the attack, for the youth seemed to have suddenly been transformed into a destroying fury, and quick, sharp exclamations of vengeance continually fell from his lips, while he plied the rifle with a dexterity which told that he was no novice in such warfare.

In a moment he had cleared for himself a path through the ranks of his foes, and once more, with his weapon at a trail, he was pushing toward the lake. But he ran at the top of his speed now, and eight mad red-men were on his trail.

Determined to take the daring half breed alive, they put forth their entire strength in the pursuit.

Ahdeek ran, perhaps, as he never ran before, for the fellows on his trail were fresh, while before the attack his features and physique indicated fatigue.

However, he cleared fallen trees and clumps of briars with astonishing dexterity, and at length the swash of Superior's waves against the pictured rocks, fell upon his ears.

"Ahdeek soon meet Nahma, if Kitchi-Manitou watches over him!" said the half-breed, between short breaths. "But he dead; he travel long from the little lake near where Pontiac makes war speeches to his braves, and he loaded with powder for Nahma and Ahdeek."

The pursuers seemed to notice their victim's exhaustion; once or twice he touched obstacles which, a few moments since, he could have cleared without difficulty, and, speaking encouragingly to each other, they sent up a chorus of yells which must have fallen laden with doom upon the heart of the hunted.

Nearer and nearer the pictured cliffs Ahdeek approached.

The sun had disappeared beneath the surface of Superior's restless waves, and the forest was growing dark.

Suddenly, with a grunt indicative of a surprise which smacked of the terrible, the hunted half-breed stopped in his tracks, and threw his rifle above his head, while he gripped the blade of his keen knife between his teeth.

The cause for this strange action was the presence of a new foe, and that foe indicated his position by a pair of fiery

eyeballs, and low, hoarse growls of bloodthirsty vindictiveness.

Ahdeek might have avoided the danger by rushing on; but the suddenness with which he had discovered the panther—for an upward glance had revealed the wood-terror's whereabouts—had caused him to halt. It was a perilous moment, and all at once, with a trebly fierce growl, the beast left the limb, and shot down upon Ahdeek like a descending bomb, as fierce and irresistible.

The half-breed recoiled a pace and struck. But his rifle, outreaching too far, fell upon the panther's haunches, and a second later he was borne backward, his unprotected shoulder between the pearly teeth of the brute.

He struggled bravely, but, weakened by the life-chase and deprived of his knife, he could do but little.

He heard the footsteps, almost drowned by yells, that approached from the east, and then, ceasing to struggle, his head fell back, and calmly he gazed at the brute whose weight seemed to crush his breast.

"Panther eat Ahdeek," he cried. "Don't let Chippewa burn him. They hunt him long—panther catch him, at last!"

With the utterance of the last word, the footsteps grew silent, and the following moment the death-yell of the panther mingled with the roar of the water that spent its fury against the foundation of Chapel Rock.

Ahdeek started at the shot, raised himself to his knees, and felt and looked for his weapons.

In a moment his eyes fell upon his rifle, and, with a yell of triumph, he sprung toward it.

He was determined to die rather than surrender to implacable foes, who had lately drank the blood of peaceful traders, "scooped up in the hollow of joined hands."

He turned, with clubbed rifle, despite the fearful pain which his wounded shoulder caused, and dared the vengeance of his foes with a shout of defiance.

The shout was greeted with one of like import, and a moment later, the Chippewas had closed around the brave half-breed.

Ahdeek struck with his remaining strength; but the rifle

was caught by a young Hercules, and wrenched from his grip.

"Now, what says the White Tiger?" cried a savage, triumphantly.

"He says that he slew the Black Eagle with his rifle," was the reply. "Not far away lie four Chippewas, who have sung the war-song for the last time. Ahdeek struck them! Squaws, the young half-breed has not lived in vain!"

Irritated beyond endurance, the savages contracted their red ranks, and tomahawks shot upward for the carnival of death.

Ahdeek rose with an effort, and faced the savages with folded arms.

"Strike! Send Ahdeek after Black Eagle."

"The White Tiger of Gitche Gumee dies here!" was the reply, and the spokesman of the party clutched the half-breed's shoulder, as he raised his knife.

But a yell, the counterpart of which pealed from Ahdeek's throat when attacked in the dell, startled every one, and the next moment a youthful figure dropped, like a thunderbolt, among the Chippewas.

"Devils!" he cried, hurling aside the Indian who held Ahdeek. "Demons, you've caught the wrong man, I say. *I* am the White Tiger of Lake Superior! *I*, not the half-breed, am the hunted depopulator of your accursed race!"

The savages recoiled aghast, as a dark cloak fell from the youth's shoulders, and exposed his handsome figure.

Ahdeek, with a cry of "Nahma!" stepped to the Destroyer's side.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIGURE IN THE CHAPEL.

THE youth's voice broke the silence that followed his last word:

"The Chippewas face the White Tiger now!" he thundered, as his rifle struck his shoulder, and his eye swept the startled band before him. "He is not merciless. Bad In-

dians have lied about him ; he does not live on blood. Now, back to your lodges toward the rising sun. I spare you now, but if ever you cross the White Tiger's trail again, Chippewas, you shall feel his teeth then. I spare you for this time, because you are young warriors. Why stand you here staring ? Back to the trails that lead to the council-fires. Back ! I say, before the White Tiger slays !"

With the last words the youth's cheek dropped nearer the rifle, and the muzzle almost touched the leader's forehead.

" Go !" he thundered again. " Hark ! the Manitou is speaking ; he is painting the waves of Gitehe Gumee with his fire."

The dread of the White Tiger was manifest then, for, without a word in reply, the sub-chief turned on his heel, and strode deliberately into the forest.

" Warriors, follow your chief !" cried the Destroyer, and a moment later he and Ahdeek stood alone amid the prevailing darkness.

" They fear the White Tiger, Ahdeek," said the youth, with a smile, as he turned to the young half-breed. " Boy, had it not been for your wounded condition, eight Chippewas would not have walked from this spot. But you could not assist, so I took advantage of the terror which I had inspired in their bosoms, and, see, they run from the White Tiger when he follows not."

" Nahma has broken his word," said the young half-breed, refusing to return the smile of mingled scorn and contempt that wreathed White Tiger's lips. " He said that he would never show himself to the red-man while Ahdeek stood among them. They should not see Nahma and Ahdeek with one eye."

" I know it, Ahdeek ; but I could not avoid it to-night. Ahdeek was on the death-trail ; Nahma was near, and his arm, his words, not forked like the trees, alone could snatch his brother from the jaws of death. Ahdeek will forgive, will he not ?"

They were walking toward the lake now, and in the stillness of that festooned woods the half-breed put forth his hand.

" Ahdeek will forgive his pale brother," he said, in a low,

cautious tone. "Nahma could not keep his oath, and save his Ahdeek."

"Then all is well, boy," replied the white youth. "The Chippewas now know that Ahdeek is not the White Tiger of Lake Superior, and that instead of hunting one destroyer, they must hunt, and be hunted by, two. But, boy, did you get the powder?"

"Ahdeek wears two big belts full," replied the half-breed.

"Good! we shall not want now. What are the Indians doing?"

"Bad work! bad work!" cried the half-breed. "Pontiac has struck one hard blow on the big waters."

"That Ottawa fiend! How I wish he would show his painted face in these parts!" ejaculated the youth, and his fingers closed on his rifle with determined emphasis as he spoke. "But tell me about that strong blow, Ahdeek."

Then the half-breed proceeded to give an account of the fall of the lake forts, and the investment of Detroit, all of which was news to the white youth.

"While the Ottawas and their allies struck the posts, the Chippewas struck the trappers hereabouts," said the White Tiger. "Ahdeek, I can tell you of twenty-eight trappers who fell in their huts or at their traps the selfsame night."

Ahdeek clutched the Destroyer's arm.

"Trappers all dead?"

"All but several who escaped in boats."

"Where Snowbeard?"

"Dead."

The half-breed groaned.

"Where house?"

"Burned up!"

White teeth gritted audibly in the darkness.

"Now, Ahdeek," said the youth, "now that Snowbeard is dead, tell me what he was to you. Why have you left the castle at midnight to seek the hut of that old man! Unravel the mystery while I unfasten the boat."

The youth stooped over the rope that lashed a little boat to a sharp rock, and tugged at the knots.

"Ahdeek can not tell Nahma until he takes the trail to Snowbeard's house."

"Boy, I will keep the secret. Is Ahdeek afraid to trust his brother?"

"Afraid to trust the brother whose couch he has shared for many moons? No!" cried the half-breed. "But he can not tell now. Old Snowbeard was dear to Ahdeek, and the Chippewas shall feel more than ever now the wildcat's claws and teeth."

The youth did not reply, but continued to work at the boat in silence. Above him the harsh thunder rolled, and the stormy waves and rocky shore were vividly revealed by the glare of lightning.

At length, tired of tugging at knots which the spray had rendered openless, the boy, with an ejaculation of impatience, severed the rope, and the twain seated themselves in the boat.

"I'll paddle, Ahdeek," said the white youth. "Don't worry your shoulder with any work till I get it fixed up, in the castle. Those devilish panthers can bite like all get out."

"Panthers' teeth sharp," replied the half-breed, passing a hand lightly over the crunched shoulder; "but shoulder soon be well."

"Providence willing," smiled the youth, and a moment later he continued:

"Ahdeek, a ghost has visited Gitche Gumee during your absence."

An exclamation of surprise followed this startling announcement, and by the lightning the Destroyer saw a pair of eyes staring into his.

"A spirit from the Manitou land on the big sea water?"

"I should call what I have seen a ghost," was the still mysterious reply. "One week ago this very night of storm, I saw it first. I was out on the lake near the Fox's Leap, and the lightning flashed as it flashes now. The waves were mad, and to a rock that protruded above them I moored the boat, resolved to enjoy the storm. All at once theplash of paddles struck my ears, but the next moment all was still, and I dismissed the thought. Then, just as I had relaxed my vigilance, a flash of lightning came, and, Ahdeek, within five feet of me, lashed to my crag, I beheld a boat."

"A real boat?" interrupted the half-breed.

"A canoe from spirit-land, I guess," said the Destroyer,

smiling. "The boat, as I could see at a glance, was fashioned like ours, and, boy, it looked like the boat some thief stole from you a moon since. In that boat sat a human being, most beautiful to behold. She was white like the lilies, and as fair. I saw her but a moment, for all became dark, but ere the last beam of light fled I saw her start, for our eyes had met. Instantly I sprung forward and gripped her rope, but the next second I heard the zip of a knife-blade, as it cut the wind, and I held a worthless piece of rope in my hand."

"Spirit gone!" smiled the half-breed.

"Yes, the boat and its occupant had vanished. I could not trail her on water, and I hunted for her till the storm-clouds passed off, and the stars shone again. I've looked for her every night since, Ahdeek. I've lain for hours in my boat moored to that rock, but the ghost would not come back. I'd like to have you see it, Ahdeek; you'd believe in spirits then, I'm thinking."

The half-breed laughed in a low voice, but a thoughtful expression soon returned to his face.

"He had a daughter who was a papoose when the squaw died," he murmured, in a low tone; but he did not know that the ear of the White Tiger, who was paddling intently through the white-crested waves, almost touched his lips.

"Did White Tiger hear what Ahdeek's lips said?" exclaimed the half-breed, as the lightning suddenly revealed his brother's attitude.

"I was listening to the waves, boy," was the evasive reply, and the paddle was thrust deeper into the water. "We are near the chapel now. Hark! how madly the waves dash against its foundation."

The youth now guided the boat further out into the lake, and dexterously avoided sunken rocks, which yearned for victims.

The flashes of lightning were quite frequent, and told the voyagers that the storm would discharge its fury about the spot where their cave was situated, nearly nine miles below Chapel Rock.

"I despise this place on such a night," ejaculated the white youth. "We always strike one rock, and they're getting thick now."

The words had scarcely left his mouth when the little canoe brought up against the rock, and all sounds were drowned by a peal of thunder.

"We're near the chapel," said Ahdeek.

"Near enough to shoot an Indian from the 'pulpit,'" replied the Destroyer. "Curse this rock! We'll rest here, and look at the boat."

So he threw a noose over the sharp crag, and proceeded to examine the craft which the waves tossed hither and thither, like a cork.

Ahdeek did not assist, but kept his face turned toward Chapel Rock, waiting for something, as his countenance indicated.

That something seemed to be a flash of lightning, for, as it lit up the water, the half-breed started back with a cry of amazement.

"What's up, Ahdeek?" cried the white boy—for boy in years the young Destroyer seemed—turning quickly from his labor.

"This spirit!" gasped Ahdeek, and his fingers encircled the youth's arm.

"Look up at chapel and wait," he continued. "Nahma see ghost high on rock;" and then in silence the twain waited for the lightning.

The "Grand Chapel," as the famous rock is now called, stood about fifty feet above the level of the lake, and its arched roof was supported by two gigantic and beautiful columns, which appear to have been hewn and placed there by skillful hands. The backward reach of the roof rests upon the main cliff, and within the chapel is the base of a broken column that is strongly suggestive of a pulpit. The roof was then, and still is, crowned with a growth of fir trees.

"Ahdeek sure see ghost in chapel. There! look."

The lightning played about the great rock a second, and in that brief moment of time the Destroyer beheld the figure of a young girl standing against the "pulpit" in the chapel. The color and trimming of her close-fitting garments could not be distinguished; and her head was crowned with a white fox-cap, and her right hand clutched a rifle whose stock glittered like silver, and rested on the ground at her feet.

She seemed the queen of the storm as she stood above the waves which madly leaped up the base of the rock, eager, as it were, to grip and pull her down.

"The ghost, by heavens!" exclaimed the Destroyer. "Another flash—now!"

They looked again, and in the succeeding darkness clutched each others' arms.

"Ahdeek, did you see—"

"Indians above the chapel!"

"I saw but one."

"Ahdeek thought he saw another feather."

"It might have been a fir."

"Yes, the light did not last long. The Indian Ahdeek saw, hung over the chapel with a tomahawk in his hand."

The White Tiger was silent for a moment.

"They've tracked her to the chapel, and with the next flash the brave intends to hurl his tomahawk into her brain. Ahdeek, steady the canoe, for God's sake!"

The half-breed dropped his rifle, and hurried to the furthest end of the light craft, which action served in a measure to steady it in the momentary languor of the waves.

The youth cocked and raised his rifle; but with a cry of horror he quickly lowered it, without firing, before the flash of the next electric bolt disappeared.

Three half-naked, painted, and feathered savages stood within the chapel, and a fourth was lowering himself from the roof!

But the girl—the spirit of the lake—was gone—not a sign of her late occupation of the chapel was visible!

"Strange! terribly strange?" cried the young Destroyer. "I'd give a hand to know where she is."

"Ask the mad waters," said Ahdeek. "The brave's tomahawk knocked spirit from chapel."

"Don't make me think thus, boy. She's too pretty, too bold, to die in such a way. I wonder who she was—or is, for I will not believe her dead."

"Then how she got from Indians?"

The youth was silenced.

There was but one way to escape the savages, and that was by a leap into the white waters, forty feet below the chapel!

And that leap, seemingly, was but a synonym of death.

"We must go, Ahdeek," suddenly cried the Destroyer. "But, first, we'll tell those murderers that somebody besides themselves are abroad. We can shoot into the chapel in the dark. We know exactly where it is. Ready!"

The next moment two rifles were raised, and two reports blended with the roar of the waters.

"Loose the canoe now.

The half-breed obeyed, and as the paddles kissed the waves once more, the lightning revealed but two Indians in the chapel!

"We dropped two," said the white youth, triumphantly, "And now—"

He was interrupted by a cry of discovery.

"Ahdeek, what—"

"Ahdeek's lost his shining ring," was the startling response. "Oh, Kitchi-Manitou, where is it?"

"In the lake, Ahdeek."

"No, no, say in the woods, White Tiger. Ahdeek swore to give it to a pale girl after a time. Here, brother, kill Ahdeek for breaking his word. Ahdeek is a bigger fool than Paupaukeewis. Pale girl never get ring now. Ahdeek ought to die for losing it," and the half-breed hid his eyes as he groaned in all the bitterness of his soul.

"What is the mystery that enwraps this wild boy's birth and that ring?" murmured the Destroyer, as he steered the frail boat among the rocks. "For months I have tried to fathom it, but can not. He keeps secrets well. He has said that the pale girl might come after the ring some day, and I half—no, I *wholly* believe that the girl in the chapel was the owner of Adeek's ring, which he would have defended with the last drop of his blood."

CHAPTER III.

THE CAVE.

IT was near midnight when the two voyagers reached their cave home, whose main entrance was through a beautiful arch more than one hundred feet in height. It lay but eight miles to the west of Chapel Rock, but the time spent by the twain while watching the strange and ghostly tableaux, which the lightning had revealed, prevented them from reaching the "castle" sooner.

The waves were still unpacified; they dashed into the arch with a fury perfectly irresistible, and the Destroyer laid the paddle aside as the white-crested billows took up the barque in their arms, as it were, and hurled it far into the cave.

"Well, Ahdeek, here we are once more," said the youth, springing from the canoe, which the receding waves had left stranded on the hard floor of the natural hall. "Now, if nobody has disturbed our furniture and so forth, we are, indeed, all right. I, for one white boy, feel sleepy, and I hope daylight will find me in the arms of the drowsy god."

"Alseek not sleepy at all," was the reply, as the speaker stepped from the boat. "He want to find ring, so that when pale girl come to him an' say, 'Where ring?' Ahdeek say, 'Here, pale girl,' an' he give it up."

"Boy, where do you think you lost the ring?" questioned the White Tiger.

The half-breed, forgetting that they stood in Cimmerian darkness, answered with a shake of his head, which, of course, his companion could not see.

"Maybe you lost it in the woods, when the Chippewas chased you?" he suggested.

"Ahdeek go back on trail to morrow. He hunt for ring; if he no hunt, the bones of the old pale-face will rise from his grave and haunt half-breed."

"Well, we'll cease to talk about that ring," said the De-

stroyer, who had lifted the canoe from the beach, and deposited it on pegs against the black wall. "I'm so glad that you've returned safely, and, after supper I'll fix your shoulder up; then we'll divide the powder."

They moved off in the gloom.

"So," said Ahdeek, musingly, "Chippewas kill all traders. Did they hunt for White Tiger?"

"I should reckon the red fiends did hunt for me," replied the youth. "Day and night, since the massacre, I have had legions of dusky foes on my trail, but I have succeeded in eluding them, and when they least expected the White Tiger, he would leap upon them, and bury his teeth in their flesh."

The half-breed uttered a low ejaculation of supreme satisfaction.

Now all conversation ceased, and presently Ahdeek found himself standing alone against a ragged wall. His companion had suddenly, noiselessly deserted him, and presently the whine of a panther's cub saluted his ears.

"Nobody in castle," muttered Ahdeek, starting forward, and when he had advanced several steps the flash of flints greeted his vision.

"The coast is clear, boy," said the Destroyer, looking up from the fire he was kindling. "We'll enjoy a rest now, and then we'll see if we can't find the ring, the ghost, and at the same time, pay the Indians for killing our trader friends."

The half-breed threw himself before the blaze, and tenderly removed his hunting-coat.

"White Tiger look at shoulder now," he said; "it beginning to hurt."

But the boy did not reply. He was gazing at the opposite wall of the cavern, and slowly, and apparently without noticing Ahdeek, he drew a torch from the fire and rose to his feet.

Ahdeek regarded him, silenced by wonder, and afraid to move.

Once or twice the youth flourished the flambeau about his head, to brighten the blaze, and then approached the wall with rapid strides.

"Am I the victim of a delusion?" he queried in a low

tone. "Surely I saw marks on the wall—marks which were not there when I left this place four days since."

Within several feet of the rock he paused, and looked straight ahead, but saw nothing save gray stone, highly polished by the hand of nature.

For a moment he was inclined to laugh at this deception, when suddenly Ahdeek leaped from the fire and with a cry of "The ring!—the ring!" bounded toward him.

Was Ahdeek a victim of the delusion as well as himself?

"There's no ring here, boy," began the Destroyer, with a bright smile. "Our eyes—"

But his sentence was broken abruptly, for the half-breed jerked him, with much rudeness, to one side, and pointed to the wall obliquely to their right.

The youth uttered a cry of profound wonderment, for on the glittering surface of the wall, he saw a large ring which, notwithstanding the rude tracery, resembled the bauble that Ahdeek had lately lost!

For a minute the twain looked from the picture into each others' faces.

What did the ring mean? Who had traced it on the wall?

The Destroyer stepped nearer, and letters suddenly grew into being on the smooth stone. The changing of the torch revealed them.

"What words say?" cried Ahdeek, clutching his comrade's arm, as he pointed excitedly to the letters which he could not master.

The young death-dealer did not reply, but continued to hift his position until every letter was plainly revealed.

Then he read:

"White Tiger, you have my father's ring! Meet me here one week from this night, and place it on my finger, else I rid the Chippewas of their Destroyer."

"August 12, 1763.

"Signed, MARIE KNIGHT."

The Destroyer read the inscription twice before he moved a muscle.

"Come, brother, what words say?" questioned Ahdeek, impatiently.

"They tell you to place the ring on the pale girl's hand one week from last night, or die."

The half-breed smiled ludicrously.

"Ring lost."

"It must be found!"

"But where pale girl?"

The death-dealer shook his head, and the scene on Chapel Rock again swam before his eyes

"How girl know Ahdeek had ring?" questioned the boy, a moment later.

"No doubt she caught a glimpse of it in the wood, as you rushed past her some time. She has tracked you to the cave, and discovered that here you live. She believes you the real White Tiger, and, entering here last night, and finding you absent, she has left her commands on the wall."

Ahdeek nodded, and murmured, "Good, good!"

At length he looked up.

"Come, White Tiger, tie-up Ahdeek's wounds," he said. "He want to go hunt pale girl's ring. He go 'fore day."

"No, no, you must stay here until *I* leave," said the Destroyer, with determination. "Consider, boy; she will not return for one week. In two days we can retrace your tracks. You lost the ring in the wood to-night—not in the lake, as I first thought, for your hands were not in the water. But really, boy, I think that the pale girl will never come for the ring."

The half-breed looked up inquiringly.

"I believe that we saw her in Chapel Rock to-night."

Ahdeek shook his head.

"May be pale girl," he said.

"Then she must be dead. So, Ahdeek, don't trouble yourself—"

"Pale girl not dead!" interrupted the half-breed, bringing his hand down upon his brother's shoulder with emphasis. "He said that she would come for ring, and while he spoke, Kitchi-Manitou took him to his lodge."

"Who was *he*, Ahdeek?"

"Can't tell now, White Tiger," was the reply. "She not dead; she must have ring within six sleeps, or Ahdeek steps upon the long trail."

"No!" cried the young avenger. "Ahdeek, we are brothers, and I will kill the person who sheds one drop of your blood—I'll break the arm that is uplifted to strike you."

"White Tiger better not strike pale girl," said the half-breed, looking the Destroyer squarely in the eye. "She—"

Here he caught his tongue, and for the fourth time called attention to his shoulder.

Before turning to the fire, the youth re-read the writing on the wall, and, as he stepped therefrom, the lines gradually faded, until they were entirely lost to his vision.

Ahdeek remained sullen during the dressing of his wound, which was not so bad as it might have been, the heavy hunting-frock having protected his flesh.

"I do not think the Indians killed Doc Cromer," said the Destroyer, looking up from the meal they were discussing before the blaze. "I couldn't find his body after the massacre, and I wonder that he has not been here. You know, boy, that he was the only trader who knew our cave."

"Oh, he dead, like all the traders!" said the half-breed. "Indians make sure work of traders. Pontiac got long arms and strong voice."

The final word still quivered Ahdeek's lips, when the boy Destroyer dropped his pemmican at the edge of the fire, and leaped to his feet.

A second later the half-breed followed his example, and side by side the twain stood facing the entrance with ready rifles.

A score of rifle-shots, scarcely distinguishable from a single report, had risen above the noise of the storm, just beyond the mouth of the castle.

"The Chips are everywhere!" exclaimed the youth, in a low tone. "Who can they be chasing to-night?"

The question was answered by the sound of footsteps, and the next moment a figure bounded from the corridor into the firelight. Upon a sight of it, the faces of the tenants of the cave touched their rifle-stocks; but the Destroyer quickly dropped his weapon and covered Ahdeek's flint with his hand.

"Spare him, Ahdeek!" he cried. "'Tis Cromer, thank God!"

The new-comer looked up at the mention of his name, it

tered a light cry of joy, staggered forward, and then sunk heavily to the ground.

"Shot by the red fiends!" cried the Destroyer, springing toward the prostrate man, who lay on the rocks bleeding, gasping, and trying to rise.

"Leave me!" he ejaculated, noticing the Destroyer's action. "They were watching the cave, curse—the—hounds! Listen! there! they're coming now. Go! they can't torture the old trader who outwitted them at his cabin!"

"We won't leave you, Doc," said the youth. "We are not ingrates."

"Rifle, rifle, then!" shrieked the trader. "One more shot before I go!"

With mighty effort he raised himself to his knees, and gripped the weapon which Ahdeek, with a cry of admiration, thrust forward.

There was no retreating. The trader was too weak to run; the avengers too brave, too manly to desert him to the tomahawk.

The moment that followed the trader's last words saw the mouth of the corridor swarming with Indians.

They were met by a trio of rifles, not a shot of which was thrown away.

The Chippewas did not pause; their dead comrades were hurled aside before they could touch the ground, and, though the heroic three used their pistols to advantage, they rushed on to certain victory—which so often rewards overwhelming numbers.

Doc Cromer, the trader, sunk exhausted before the fierce onset, and the clubbed rifles of the White Tiger and his darker brother, who disputed the ground with heroic valor, could not turn the fortune of battle.

For a moment a confused mass of humanity swayed to and fro in the center of the cavern, then it became entangled, and a terrific shout soared to the circled roof.

It was a shout telling that the bitterest enemies the Indians ever possessed, had fallen alive into their hands.

CHAPTER IV.

FIGHTING FOR A PRIZE.

THE light that broke upon the lake after the night of storm and tempest greeted a calm.

The white crested billows had returned to their strongholds, but the lake shore was strewn with their handiwork. Strong trees, which the wind had uprooted on islands, had been dashed upon the beach, and in some places tree was heaped on tree, lending a terrible aspect to the stony shore. Such storms are frequent visitors to Lake Superior, even at this late day.

In the branching top of a young fir, which lay at the edge of the water, not far from Chapel Rock, something scintillated like a diamond, in the strong light.

Its brightness would have dazzled the eyes of a beholder, and, with the belief that it was something very valuable, he would have been drawn to the spot.

As the sun climbed the eastern horizon and darted its beams over the "pulpit," directly upon the shining "thing," the fir-limbs moved as though something imbued with life lay beneath them, and possessed the curiosity.

The woods and shores of Superior swarmed with Indians, and it is not surprising that from the cliffs above, a red hunter riveted his eyes upon the particular spot described. Evidently the young brave had lately reached the heights, for his dress showed proofs of a long journey, and the results of a late war expedition, in the shape of a snowy scalp, hung at his deer-skin girdle.

He had approached the cliff with that proverbial caution characteristic of his people, and almost the first thing that met his gaze was the shining object among the fir boughs. He started at the unexpected sight, and when, at last, the thing resolved itself into a silver star, he rose with a cry of mingled wonder and exultation, and prepared to descend. Perhaps he had caught a glimpse of something other than

the bright star, for an anxious expression overspread his face, and he looked cautiously about while he clambered down a great fissure in the cliffs. All signs of fatigue had left him now ; he seemed the fresh warrior of a fortnight since, and, after walking erect toward the fir awhile, he suddenly dropped on all fours, and moved forward again, like a wary animal.

He reached his objective point at last, and, parting the verdant boughs, peered through upon the highly ornamented butt of a light rifle !

The next moment the young Indian's eyes fell upon the owner of the weapon.

She lay near the polished barrel, only deeper among the fir, and the hue of a corpse rested upon her fair face and slender hands.

The peeping lids gave the savage a glimpse of blue eyes, and the masses of golden hair, darkened by the water they held imprisoned, must have captivated him.

Motionless, breathless she lay on the stony ground, and the hand which the Indian touched was as cold as ice.

He shook his head sorrowfully as he tenderly lifted the body from the ground.

"Silver Rifle dead ! She no be Dohma's now ! Why she come to Gitchee Gumee ? To die by the big waters an' be buried by the Chippewa whose heart she stole three moons ago ? Dohma go bury Silver Rifle in big hole, far from bad waters."

He did not neglect the beautiful rifle, as he moved down the lake shore with his burden, for he bore it in the same hand that gripped his own.

A few minutes' walk brought him to one of the Superior's numerous caverns, which he entered by wading to his waist in the cold water. Soon he found himself in gross darkness, through which he groped his way for several hundred feet.

At length he paused, and laid his burden on the ground.

Then, with the aid of his flints, he kindled a fire among some dried fir-boughs, into the light of which he bore his silent prize.

"No Injun strike Silver Rifle," he murmured aloud. "She fell into water, and the big waves around her. Dohma follow

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her long time to tell her he love her; but he never catch her till—now!"

While he spoke he was unconsciously chafing the bare arms which the loose-fitting sleeves revealed, and all at once he started to his feet, and gazed with all the Indian superstition in his dark eye, upon the girl.

The eyes had opened and closed with a dreaminess not of earth

A minute later and Dohmah was at her side again..

"Silver Rifle live for Dohma!" he cried with joy "She no dead, now. The Great Spirit has heard the prayer of the young chief!"

Once more he fell to the work of restoring the girl to consciousness with renewed vigor, and at last found her staring into his swarthy face. For several moments she seemed to be recalling certain reminiscences of the past, and then, all at once, she rose to her feet, and deliberately picked up her silver rifle.

"Silver Rifle no shoot," said the Indian, with a smile. "Powder all wet, flints make fire, but won't burn powder."

She flung the rifle aside, and her hands dropped to her girdle.

"Knife gone, too," said the Chippewa. "Silver Rifle no weapons."

Then, like one in a dream, she moved to the Indian's side, and stood over him in silence. She had not fully recovered her senses.

"Silver Rifle come to Dohmah," he said, gently, taking her hand. "He find her among fir, and bring her to cave."

She did not resist, and the young savage drew her down to his side, and looked lovingly into her eyes.

Slowly but surely her reason returned, and while the Chippewa was in the midst of a recital of his hunt for her, a footstep sounded on the flinty floor.

Quickly Dohma's hand shot forward to his rifle, and wheeling as he leaped to his feet, he confronted a huge Indian, a foot taller than himself, and with the physique of a Hercules.

For a moment the two Chippewas faced each other amid dead silence, and then Dohma extended his hand, which the giant gripped as he glanced at the girl.

"Silver Rifle and Dohma live in ~~cave~~?" he said, with a sneer, which, although scarcely perceptible, did not escape the young chief's notice.

"Dohma find Silver Rifle dead by the big waters. But he bring her back to the world," was the calm rejoinder.

"Now what Dohma goin' to do with Silver Rifle?"

"Teach her to love him!"

The giant bit his nether lip.

"Dohma is a Chippewa, so is Renadah," he said, after a minute's angry silence. "Dohma is brave, but his aim is not so long as his big red brother's."

"But it is as strong!" retorted Dohma, with determination, and as he spoke he calmly stepped between Silver Rifle and the tall chief.

"Dohma is a young fir; Renadah is the great oak that grows in the big woods. He could crush Dohma with one limb."

"Let him try it!"

"He would not harm his red brother. Our great king, Pontiac, needs brave red-men now; but Dohma, if he would help exterminate the hated English, must do one thing."

The young Indian did not speak, but noted the glance which Renadah threw over his shoulder at Silver Rifle.

"He must give to Renadah the woman he loves!"

Dohma heard a low cry of horror part a pair of pale lips, and caught a glimpse of Silver Rifle as she recovered her weapon.

"Dohma will not give Silver Rifle to Renadah," he said, calmly. "He found her dead and brought her spirit back from Manitou-land—so, she is *his*!"

"She is Renadah's! The wildcat of the Chippewas saw her before Dohma knew that she was near Gitche Gumee."

"Renadah lies!"

A cry of rage parted the tall chief's lips, and he strode forward as his smaller enemy retreated with drawn tomahawk.

"Renadah, Silver Rifle can belong to but one of us," said Dohma. "We will fight for her!"

"So be it!" cried Renadah, contemptuously. "Back beyond the fire, Silver Rifle, touch the wall and be a stone there. Dohma and Renadah fight for you."

Without a word the girl hurried to the wall of the cavern, and surveyed the red duelists.

On either side of the fire they stood with ready weapons, and at a signal from Renadah the tomahawks were uplifted.

A second signal quickly followed, and the hatchets went crashing through the air like thunderbolts.

Silver Rifle saw Dohma's tomahawk miss his enemy's head by an inch, and a wild shriek that quickly followed, told her that the giant's aim had been truer.

Dohma threw up his arms, and while he spun round like a top, his antagonist shot toward him with a cry of triumph!

The single spectator sprung from the wall, and, rifle in hand, darted toward the mouth of the corridor.

But Renadah saw the movement, and, relinquishing his victim, turned and pursued.

A few bounds brought him near the girl, whose limbs were bruised by the rocks against which the waves had hurled her unconscious body, and suddenly, still in the firelight, she stopped.

She saw the giant form that swooped down upon her, and as the red arm leaped forward to claim the prize which it had just won, she struck with the butt of her rifle!

"Coocha!" shrieked Renadah, recoiling from the blow, which had driven the flint to the bone of his arm. "Silver Rifle—"

The girl's action broke the sentence, and he threw up his arm again to ward off the second stroke.

But the shield was useless, for Silver Rifle seemed to spring into the air as she dealt the blow, and with a cry closely allied to a death-groan, Renadah staggered back and dropped beside his victim!

"Free again!" said the victor, surveying the work of rifle and hatchet. "Little did Dohma think that he was bearing me to my stronghold when he brought me hither! Noble red youth, you saved my life to-day; would to heaven I could have saved yours! The giant must have seen me borne home, and so he followed. Dangers thicken fast—dangers and love," and a smile played with her lips. "I did not seek this wild land for lovers—especially red ones. No, I came hither to find a father, or a ring that will tell me much. Silver Rifle,

the Girl Trailer, will find the ring ! The White Tiger of the lakes wears it on his hand, and she has commanded him to give it to its owner. He shall comply or die !"

With the last word a sound startled her, and she glanced toward the savages.

Dohma was sitting bolt upright !

The girl darted forward.

" Dohma, our fates are inseparable," she cried, washing the blood from his face. " Heaven tells me they are. Together we will hunt the White Tiger and find the ring."

The Indian smiled, and looked up into Silver Rifle's face inquiringly.

" Silver Rifle lose ring ?"

" Yes," eagerly, anxiously.

" Yellow ring with pretty stone ?"

" Yes, Dohma. You know something about it !" almost shrieked the girl.

" Dohma find ring in big wood just 'fore he find Silver Rifle ; but he no put it on his finger. See there, pale girl ?" and with the question, the Indian held up his left hand, the third finger of which was missing.

" Dohma find ring once, put it on finger. Ring no come off when white trader want it, so chief cut off Dohma's finger to get ring. When Dohma saw pretty ring in woods, he said bad word, an' let it lay."

Silver Rifle groaned.

" Could you find it again ?" she cried, eagerly.

" Dohma go right to it. It near two big oaks, close to Gitche Gumee."

" Then we'll find it !" cried the girl. " Soon I will know who I am ; soon I'll lift the vail of mystery that enwraps my birth. How came the ring in the forest ? Have the Indians killed the White Tiger ? or did he drop the ring ?"

" White Tigers live," said the Indian.

" There is but one, Dohma."

" Dohma saw two White Tigers last dark. One was not white like his brother."

" The youth's mind is wandering," mused Silver Rifle.

" There is but one White Tiger, and he is a half-breed."

" Half-breed and White Tiger dress alike. Make Indians

think there is but one," said Dohma, who had caught Silver Rifle's last words. "But," and he raised his hand to the frightful wound inflicted by his rival's tomahawk, "Renadah struck deep. Dohma feel sick now. Hatchets bad medicine."

They girl saw an ashy pallor sweep over the Chippewa's face, and reached forth her hands to support him. But he eluded them, and fell backward with a groan.

"Oh, heavens! is he dead?" she cried; "and has the secret of the ring's hiding-place died with him?"

With pallid face she leant over the youth, and raised his head, which seemed to her a lump of iron ore.

"Dead—dead!" she groaned. "The trail which seemed ending grows longer than ever now. 'Near two oaks, by the lake,' he said. There lies the mystery-prisoning ring. I'll hunt it till I die! I'll tear it from the hands of the chief in the midst of his people, if I encounter it there. Heaven give me strength to meet the dangers which are to come!"

CHAPTER V.

SILVER RIFLE AMONG HER FOES.

THERE was no denying the fact—Dohma, the Chippewa, was dead. At least the girl would have sworn he was.

Silver Rifle held his head in her lap a long time before she gave him up.

She did not want to lose the young Indian when she needed him most, and now that he was gone, she feared that she would never find the ring.

"I'll bury the foes side by side," she murmured, relinquishing the heavy head, and approaching the fire. "They'll not quarrel about me in the grave, I hope."

She supplied herself with a torch from the fire, and moved to a spot some distance beyond the dead Indians, where earth instead of stone formed the floor of the cavern.

Selecting a long and sharp piece of slate, she digged a

scooped out a large grave, and with Herculean strength dragged the two savages from the light. Tenderly she wrapped Dohma in a blanket, and placed him beside the furious chief who had sent him to the hunting-grounds of his people.

"I'm going to rest awhile, now," she said, in a long-drawn breath, after finishing the work of burial, "and then I'm going into the woods again. Dohma was mistaken. But one White Tiger lives; there can not be another. I saw him on the like one night, and since, I have seen him in the woods. He is a half-breed, too. If I meet him, he must pay for losing the ring, for undoubtedly the bauble which poor Dohma found in the forest was mine."

When the sun sunk behind Chapel Rock and the shadows of night swept over lake and forest, Silver Rifle glided from the cave.

At the mouth of the entrance she found a strange boat, which belonged to Renadah, who had fallen before her arm. Doubtless he was on the water when Dohma bore his prize to the cave, and had followed in his canoe.

Quietly she stepped into the boat and sent it flying through the rocky gateways out into the calmer waters.

She coasted toward Chapel Rock, which she sounded, and presently, having scaled the cliff at a feasible point, found herself in the forest above. The canoe had been hidden among the fallen firs on the beach, and was secure from savage prowlers' eyes.

The moon was giving tokens of an early visit to the nocturnal heavens, as Silver Rifle darted into the dangerous wood, apparently having some objective point in view.

She knew where two gigantic oaks grew side by side, and to this particular spot she was hastening.

The rising moon found her hurrying along the cliffs, and after traversing several miles, she suddenly wheeled to the left and advanced with caution.

Once or twice she stopped among the ghostly shadows, for the cry of a night-bird had greeted her ears, and she quite naturally associated the sound with the presence of enemies.

But no answering signals were heard, and she advanced again until she stood beneath the boughs of the trees she had sought.

Surely these were the two oaks mentioned by Dohma; they were the only two which stood together near the lake-shore.

"The ring will greet me with its glitter," she muttered, searching around the trunks of the trees, and gradually describing larger circles, which drew her nearer the edge of the cliffs.

A pale moonlight flooded the ground, and more than once Silver Rifle was momentarily deceived by the glitter of lake pebbles, which by divers means had found their way into the forest, so far above their rocky bed.

"These are not the oaks!" she said at last, in despair, as she suddenly paused in her search. "Dohma meant other trees than these. And— Ha! what is yon dark object, and did it not move?"

Quickly her rifle dropped from her left arm, and the flint was gently drawn back, while her eye remained riveted upon the object which had startled her.

As she looked, the shape grew into the figure of a beast, and she at length concluded that it was dead. So she moved forward, and at length stood over the body of the panther which had wounded Ahdeek's shoulder with his sharp teeth. She saw evidences of a struggle on the earth about the dead beast, and discovered that white and red had met there at no remote hour.

The discovery somewhat startled the girl, and as she rose to her feet, the cry of the night-hawk sounded terribly distinct in her ears. It seemed to emanate from a spot not twenty feet to her right. Slowly but deliberately she turned toward the spot, and the next instant several dark forms leaped from behind trees, and advanced upon her!

"Keep off, red-men!" she cried. "I have as yet spilled but little Chippewa blood, for I trail not your people. Stand off, I say, else there be—"

Her sentence was cut short by a shriek, for she found herself in the grasp of a stalwart savage who had approached her from the rear, while the trio engaged her attention in front.

"White girl no shoot Chippewa now," laughed her captor, and presently Silver Rifle found herself standing in the midst of a war-party, hideously disfigured by paint. "White girl same as Dohma hunt," quickly continued the chief. "Dohma

tell Oagla he love girl whom he call Silver Rifle. White girl see Dohma?"

The girl shook her head, and the savages laughed.

"Dohma come home by um by an' find Silver Rifle in Chippewa lodge."

"Alas!" thought the girl, "Dohma would never return to his people."

"Pale girl got pretty rifle," said a tall young Indian, who wore a head-dress of hawk-feathers. "She have heap silver in her lodge. Let Hawkeye see rifle."

With the last word the Chippewa put forth his hand, when, with a startling cry, the girl started violently back.

Something glittered in the moonlight on Hawkeye's tiniest finger.

"What frighten pale girl?" demanded the chief, not wholly unfrightened himself.

"My ring! my ring!" cried Silver Rifle, starting forward. "Hawkeye, you've got my ring! Give it here!"

She pointed to the ring as she spoke; but the savage drew back, with an Indian oath.

"Ring Hawkeye's," he cried. "Him find it here by dead panther. Sequesta grabbed ring when Hawkeye saw it; so they fought for it, and Sequesta sleeps in Gitche Gumee. Girl shan't have ring. It's Hawkeye's. Too pretty for Silver Rifle."

"Then the price I shall pay for my own property shall be your blood!" cried the determined girl. "The glitter of that ring has drawn me from the white man's greatest city. I will have it, and, for the last time, I demand it. Take it from your finger, Hawkeye!"

"Hawkeye keep ring," was the determined response, and it still quivered his lips when the girl's rifle cleared a space about her.

The savages saw they had a demoness to deal with, and admired her bravery as they shrunk from the clubbed rifle. She was but a girl—a young tigress in nature, among twenty braves, and they would humor her as the cat does the mouse.

All at once the butt of the weapon dropped to her shoulder, and the next instant a sharp report shot over the cliffs.

Hawkeye, with a groan, reeled in the throes of death, like a drunken man.

Through the smoke, which obscured her form, the brave huntress sprung, and, before the savages could recover from their surprise, she had wrenched the ring from the warrior's finger, and was flying through the forest like a deer!

Hawkeye was dead. The little ring, which was to be the price of more than one life, had ended his days of savage glory, and the slayer was seeking safety in flight.

The eldest members of the war-party, recovering first, had started in pursuit, and the younger were not far in their rear. Once or twice they paused and tried to bring the girl down with the rifle; but she flitted in and out among the trees so as to destroy their aim.

One hand gripped her silver rifle, the other held the ring, and more than once she shut the member tighter than ever to satisfy her heart that the prize was still her own.

She ran toward the spot where she had left Renadah's boat, and at length disappeared in the rugged path that led down to the lake shore.

For some time she had not heard the footsteps of her pursuers, and, after hiding an hour among the rocks, she approached the beach. Quickly she drew the light craft from its hiding-place, and as she placed it in the water the click of a rifle-lock sounded above her head.

With a cry of horror she dropped the oar, and gripped her rifle.

Half way up the path she saw a tufted head, and caught the glitter of a rifle-barrel before a jet of fire dazed her eyes.

A second later she lay motionless beside the boat, and the ir resounded with yells of fiendish triumph.

Down the rugged path they came, and the foremost lifted Silver Rifle from the ground.

"Ball cut girl's head!" he cried; "but," looking up with eyes beaming with devilish satisfaction, "she no dead."

The Indians crowded round with "ughs" of surprise.

"Silver Rifle no dead," continued the warrior, "She live to die among the squaws. Oagla take ring. Him wear it now."

At first Ogala's hand shrunk from contact with the ring.

He thought of Hawkeye lying dead in the forest; but when he saw smiles of derision, with looks of covetousness, all about him, he took the ring, and dropped it into his medicine bag.

"Now, braves, back to the war-path!" he cried. "Omaha carry Silver Rifle. Oagla glad he did not kill her now. See that she does not escape; if she does, Omaha steps upon the death-trail."

Then the band ascended to the forest again, Omaha, the giant, bearing the still unconscious girl in his arms, as though she were a babe.

In single file, through the ghostly forest, the Indians advanced, and by and by the body of Hawkeye was added to the train.

"Tell me where I am!" suddenly cried the captive, startling every Indian with her voice. "I recollect the boat, the red skin on the cliff, then— Oh, heavens, am I really in the clutches of the fiends?"

"Silver Rifle in Omaha's arms," said the jailer, with a faint smile. "Indian shoot when girl go to get in boat."

"And the ring! Where is that ring, chief?"

Omaha looked up and encountered Oagla's eye.

"Ring in Gitche Gumee," he answered. "It lost forever now."

"Omaha lies!" boldly cried the Girl Trailer. "I saw the look your chief shot at you. He has the ring, and unless he gives it back to me he shall fall as Hawkeye fell."

"Pale girl shoot Injuns no more," was the response. "She die when she git to Chippewa's lodge."

"We'll talk more of dying when we get there," said Silver Rifle. "Fortune—"

Oagla suddenly turned toward the band, with uplifted hand, which broke the captive's sentence.

Instantly every savage seemed to grow into a dusky statue.

From a spot quite a distance to the right, faint cries emanated, and the forest was tinged with a light that indicated a fire.

The savages remained silent for several moments, when Oagla started toward the spot.

"The Chippewas hold a prisoner," he cried. "We will see him burn and hear his death-song."

Obedient to their chieftain's words, the savages started forward, and presently gained the summit of a wooded knoll which overlooked the torture-glen.

This spot was distant several miles from the Chippewa village, and had witnessed some of the most fiendish tortures ever inflicted by savage hands. When an enemy fell into the hands of the young braves, he was brought hither and tortured, and more than once they had spirited captives from the village and burned them here.

The war-party saw a white man lashed to a tree near the foot of the hill.

The flames were leaping at his throat with the ferocity of famished wolves, and he was boasting of fierce, vengeful triumphs over the kindred of his torturers.

"Ahdeek burns, but the White Tiger will avenge him!" cried the captive.

The savages on the hill looked into each others' faces in surprise.

"He is the White Tiger," said Oagla, "and yet he says he is not."

Omaha was puzzled, and Nahma's words rushed over Silver Rifle's mind—"There be two White Tigers!"

Now she thought he spoke truly. Here was one; where was the other?

Her thoughts were broken by a wild cry, sent simultaneously from fifty throats.

The captive had leaped from the stake, kicked the firebrands into the faces of his torturers, and was running for life through the funereal recesses of the woods.

During his narration of daring deeds, he had been tugging at his cords, and success had crowned his efforts.

With yells of dismay and vengeance, the Indians gave chase, and Oagla's braves joined them with cries at once understood.

Suddenly Silver Rifle, who had witnessed the change of fortune with a smile, jerked the jaunty mink-skin cap from her head, and waving it aloft, sent a hearty cheer of encouragement after the fugitive.

"God help the brave fellow!" she cried. "Chippewas,

he'll pay your young demons for this night's work! And I'll help him if we ever meet."

The next moment Oagla stepped before her with a cry of hatred, and she went to the earth beneath his clenched hand.

He paid dearly in the future for that blow.

CHAPTER VI.

DEMANDING THE DEAD.

"WELL, they've got Doc Cromer cornered at last. He fooled 'em completely when they pounced down upon his shanty like buzzards, an' he's goin' to try an' fool 'em ag'in. Boy, them red devils war watchin' the cave, an' when they saw me, they couldn't hold 'emselves longer, so erbout twenty let drive ter once, an' I felt a sting in my leg. Jehu! how I sent the boat through the water then, and of course they foller'd. I didn't 'spect to find both you chaps to home, fur I thought the half-breed was still off on the powder errand."

"He returned a few hours prior to our fight. I saved his life in the woods, and broke an oath by such action."

"How, boy?"

"I had sworn to Ahdeek that I would never appear to the Indians while they saw him. You see, Doc, I never had any great grudge against the reds, but Ahdeek is avenging the death of somebody—he won't tell me who. True, the greasers have bothered my traps, and that set me against them, and the boy made me swear that I would assist him to avenge the death of that mysterious personage, also, as I have further said. The Indians know that *I*, and not Ahdeek, am the real White Tiger. I told them so when I saved the boy's life. Doc, among the murdered traders I possessed many staunch friends, and if I ever escape from this difficulty, those brave fellows shall be remembered when I strike."

Doc Cromer spoke quickly.

"And are we to die here?" he asked.

"I trust not."

"Say 'No,' boy."

"No!"

The trader rose to his feet.

"Dorsey, something's going on among the young braves," he said. "They've been hobnobbing in groups for several hours, and p'r'aps they want to take one of us three down to the hollow."

"Should they take us, we'll escape, Doc."

"Yes, but we'll not be taken. Our guards are old fellows, and the young Chips will not interfere with them. Ahdeek's guards are young larks, and mind I tell you, if they take anybody 'twill be the dark boy. For that reason they separated us; the old warriors knew that the young 'uns would want a victim, an' so they set Ahdeek aside for them."

"They won't kill the boy," said the White Tiger, confidently. "He'll elude the red devils."

"Yes, he's too much for 'em. Dorsey Webb, I'm the last of the traders," and the speaker ground his teeth till the guards, attracted by the grating sound, moved nearer the wigwam and listened.

After the battle in the White Tiger's cave, the three captives were conveyed to the Chippewa village, and thrust into wigwams which were strongly guarded.

Nothing definite concerning their fate had been revealed. The Indians were reticent; but their lowering looks and the clamorings of the squaws foretold a dark future.

Cromer's wound had been rudely dressed by a Chippewa doctor, and he felt much relieved while they conversed in their prison.

"It must be near day," said the trader, after a long pause, "for it looks so dark out. The village is asleep."

"Do the guards slumber?" questioned the White Tiger in a whisper.

"Not much!" said Cromer, lightly. "When you catch a Chippewa asleep when he's entertaining such visitors like ourselves, you'll see it rain scalps. Now it's getting lighter we'll soon learn if they took Ahdeek out last night."

With the dawn of day excitement entered the village. Old warriors were seen conversing excitedly, and a strange, knowing smile played with the lips of the younger ones.

"I told you so," said Doc Cromer, turning from a crack to young Webb, who reclined on a couch of wolf-skins. "They took Ahdeek last night."

The White Tiger sprung to his feet, a painful expression crossing his face.

"Did they kill him?"

"Don't know; the torturers haven't come back. Some suspicious old greaser has just discovered the boy's empty lodge."

"Curse the fiends!" grated the Tiger. "Ahdeek was the best friend I had in the world. I loved him as a brother and —here, Doc, untie my hands and let me grieve a knife. By Heaven! I'll make a red pathway through this accursed den of devils for last night's work."

"Don't do it, boy," answered the trader, quietly and with a smile. "My hands are in a delicate situation, too. S'pose we ask one o' the guards to cut us loose."

The youth bit his lip and threw himself down on the couch again. Then he rolled over on his face and recalled the past, which he associated with Ahdeek, and thought of the dark boy's doom.

Several hours flitted over him in that position, while Doc Cromer continued to peer through the crack upon the Indian village.

Suddenly a distant shout fell upon the latter's ear, and he turned to the boy.

"Boy, did you hear that?"

"No," answered the Tiger, starting up. "If it was a cry, Doc, what did it mean?"

"It war a cry, and it meant that a gang of Injuns is comin into town with a captive."

"A captive? Who can it be?"

"I'm puzzled," said Doc. "The traders ar' dead, an' Injun don't fight Injun in this war. Come hyar an' look through this crack. We'll see presently who's comin'."

The youth rose and moved to a crack below the one through which his fellow-prisoner had been taking observations, and in silence they watched for the returning band.

The great council-square of the village soon thronged with Indians of both sexes and all ages, whose eyes were turned

to the north, from which direction the shout had emanated.

"There they come, down the hill," whispered Cromer, as a dark body of Indians descended a rise among the suburbs of the town. "They've got a captive, but not Ahdeek."

A few minutes later, the band joined their comrades in the "square," where the red ranks broke at a signal, and the gaze of the prisoners fell upon Silver Rifle!

"The Spirit of the Lake!" cried the White Tiger, starting from his post.

"True, by hokey! Not much ghost there, boy. I wonder how they came to catch 'er? Surely they won't kill *her*—she's too pretty. Some chief 'll take her for his squaw."

"Not if I can drive a knife to his heart!"

Cromer turned quickly upon the fiery speaker.

"You claim her, then?" he said, with a smile.

"No; but she sha'n't be an Indian slave. I never met her with a word. She knows I live, that is all, and she may see me die."

"True as Gospel. But let the gal alone. Think of John Burton; he tried to cheat an Ottawa out of a white gal, an' got his everlastin' fur his trouble. Gals ar' dangerous things—worse nor rattlesnakes to fool arter. Therefore, let that white piece out thar alone."

"Doc, I thank you always for advice, whether I take it or not. But see how she faces the demons."

"She's grit, no doubt, but then she's got to make the best of her situation. I don't care much for her, though I'd like to know what they've done with Ahdeek."

"Your curiosity and fear are no greater than mine, Doc," answered the Tiger. "But we'll soon hear."

The last words were called forth by the return of a guard, who had evidently been sent to the crowd to learn something concerning the new captive and the fate of the half-breed.

Doc Cromer, whose knowledge of the Chippewa language was quite extensive, applied his ear to the crevice and listened.

"Where dark White Tiger?" asked one of the sentries.

"Dead," was the reply. "He break from stake and run,

but the young braves catch him, bring him back and burn him."

"Who Ogala catch?"

"Silver Rifle. She hunt for ring in big wood near Gitche Gumee, when Chippewas slip up and catch her. Hawkeye wear ring gal lookin' for, and she killed him for it."

Doc Cromer waited to hear no more, but turned quickly upon the boy, who was waiting with painful anxiety and interest for him to speak.

"Ahdeek is dead," he said, gently, and with a sigh. "And the girl has killed the bravest of the Chippewa chiefs."

"Then there's but little hope for her."

"Precious little," was the reply. "She made a desperate attempt to get the ring."

"What do you know about the ring, Doc?"

"Nothing, only the girl war looking for it, when they surprised her. Hawkeye had the ring, an' she killed him to get it."

"Then some Indian has it now?"

"I rather guess so."

"Poor Ahdeek! he'll never get to fulfill his vow. But"—in an undertone—"I'll fulfill it for him."

"You'll do what, boy?"

Dorsey Webb started and colored to the temples.

"Nothing!" he stammered.

"True as Gospel. But—Hello! what does this mean?"

The newly returned guard had thrown back the door of the prison wigwam, and confronted the captives.

"Hondurah want pale-faces in big place," he said. "Want to say much to them."

"Wal, lead on, an' don't stand hyar blabbin'. I'm anxious to hear what Hondurah has to say."

"Pale-face won't talk so big when sun sleeps, mebbe."

The trader made no reply; the Indian's words had set him to thinking, and, guarded by the warriors, the twain found themselves on the way to the "square."

Doc Cromer limped somewhat, on account of his wound, but the White Tiger walked bravely erect at his side, with his eyes fixed upon the motley, revengeful crowd that awaited him.

Suddenly he saw the captive girl turn toward him, and her gaze fastened itself upon his face. A moment later she started back, with a light cry, which he could not understand.

"There are two White Tigers," she said. "He spoke the truth when dying."

Presently the red crowd admitted the whites to the circle in which Silver Rifle stood, and Hondurah, a noble specimen of the North American Indian, stepped forward, with folded arms.

"Hondurah will be brief," he said, fastening his dark eyes upon the young White Tiger, who, with head thrown back in lofty defiance, met his look with unblanched cheek.

"Dohma and Renadah left their lodges five sleeps ago for the trail. They were to return last sleep. White Tiger, where are the chiefs?"

"They never crossed my trail," was the quick, but measured reply. "Hondurah, if I slew Dohma and Renadah, I would not lie about it. Neither was their blood upon my darker brother's hands."

Murmurs of incredulity ran round the red circle, which impulsively contracted.

"White Tiger lies," said the chief, slowly, but with rising indignation. "A forked tongue will do him no good here. Let him speak the truth, or die before yonder fiery Manitou sleeps below the waves of Gitche Gumee."

"I have spoken the truth, red devils," the boy hissed with such bitterness that Doc Cromer stepped reprovingly toward him. "I will not say there is blood on my hands, when there is none. Make the best of my answer. I can die but once."

Hondurah's tomahawk shot from his girdle.

"White Tiger, you have killed many Chippewas," he hissed. "We have hunted you long, never dreaming that you were a twin. Your twin brother is dead; the young braves stole him from the lodge last sleep, and burned him in the forest. You may not tread the long trail to-day by taking the forked tongue from your mouth and putting one in that is not forked. Now Hondurah asks for the last time. Where are Dohma and Renadah?"

"I don't know!" shouted the youth. "If I possessed a

knife, Hondurah, you'd never call another white boy a liar!"

The sachem almost cracked his teeth with anger.

"Chiefs," he cried, turning to several Indians who stood at his left, "to the torture-tree with the pale liar. He shall not see the sun sleep. When he burns he will tell where lie our stricken brothers. Hondurah has spoken. Away."

The chiefs had sprung forward to obey the mandate, when, with a great bound, Silver Rifle threw herself between them and the doomed boy.

"Let Silver Rifle speak first!" she cried. "In the great cave near the Manitou's chapel, sleep Dohma and Renadah, side by side. They fought for Silver Rifle—fought with tomahawks for the white girl. Dohma died, and then Renadah fell beneath *this* arm!"

She paused, and howls of rage broke from the savage band, and as Hondurah sprung toward her, scores of scalping-knives and tomahawks flashed in mid-air, and the click, click, click of rifle-locks resounded on every side.

"The innocent," she cried, "shall not suffer for the guilty! If the blood of Dohma and Renadah demand a victim, I am here. But, ere I die, let me clutch the ring that Oagla holds, for I would know who I am."

The gaze of many flitted to Oagla, who thrust his hand into the medicine-bag at his side.

For a moment he rummaged among the ocherous stones, and then withdrew his fingers.

His face told a story.

The ring was gone!

"Villain!" cried Silver Rifle, "you've thrown it away! Oh if I could live to pay you for that act!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED DEATH-SHOT.

SILVER RIFLE turned suddenly upon the Destroyer.

"You have trailed with him who has carried the ring long," she said, in a tone of intense anxiety. "Can you not tell me who I am?"

"Alas," was the reply, "I can not, girl. He kept his own secrets, and they have died with him."

A deep sigh escaped Silver Rifle's lips, and a moment later the voice of Hondurah attracted the attention of all.

"Oagla, where is the pale girl's ring?" he demanded of the chief. "Let her read life before she dies."

"Ring bad," answered Oagla, quailing with shame before the flashing eyes of his stern sachem. "It kill Hawkeye. Oagla fear it kill him, so he throw it among trees. He hate bad ring; Silver Rifle kill him for it, mebbe."

"Oagla is a coward!" thundered Hondurah, and the flash of his eyes seemed to blast the look of the superstitious and fearful chief. "The Chippewa who is afraid of a shining thing should break his gun and become a squaw. Single out your best trailers now, Oagla, and before to-morrow's sleep place the ring in Hondurah's hand, or be a chief no longer among the warlike Chippewas. Hondurah has spoken!"

And, as he resumed his former position, the chief waived aside the savages who had laid hands on the dauntless girl.

Murmurs of dissatisfaction now arose on every side, and the sachem's eye swept the multitude, as with folded arms he calmly listened to the hoarse growlings of the storm.

"Hondurah is not a dog," he cried at last. "The ring tells the white girl who she is. She does not know, and she shall not die until she knows whose child she is. When Oagla returns with the ring that talks, then shall die the three pale-faces who have spilled Chippewas' blood. Peace, warriors; it will not be long. Does Oagla know where he threw the shining talker?"

"Oagla does."

"Then let him step upon the trail before he speaks again. Wildcat, back to the prison-lodge with the White Tiger, and his mate. Silver Rifle will dwell in Hondurah's lodge, till the boughs are gathered in the forest."

While Hondurah spoke, Oagla was moving among the warriors, and presently he left the concourse, followed by six athletic young braves, who were numbered among the best trailers in the village.

The chief smarted under the reproof he had received from Hondurah, for he walked thoughtfully at the head of his warriors, and appeared to be devising a scheme which would bear fruit in the future.

"Silver Rifle learn to love Hondurah's daughter," said the chief, as he approached his lodge with the captive of his nation. "She with squaws now; but she come soon when she know that Silver Rifle goin' to be her bedfellow for one sleep."

The young trailer was ushered into the sachem's lodge, and seated herself on a heap of skins, while Hondurah moved to the entrance, in which he stood with folded arms.

Presently Silver Rifle heard him speak; then came the soft voice of woman in reply, and Hondurah stepped back into the lodge leading a beautiful Indian girl by the hand.

"Here Clearwater, Silver Rifle," he said. "She keep you company now, for Hondurah must go 'mong his chiefs."

So, as Silver Rifle rose to greet the dazzling vision of aboriginal loveliness, he parted the curtains and disappeared.

Silence reigned between the two girls for several moments.

The pale captive saw that sadness tugged at Clearwater's heart-strings and kept her silent.

"Why is Clearwater sad when the skies are so bright, and the birds sing so beautifully?" asked our heroine.

The Indian girl looked up, and nestled closer to the bosom on which she had laid her head.

"The light has left Clearwater's heart," she said, softly, sadly. "Silver Rifle, he is dead."

The last words struck a sad, sympathetic chord in our heroine's heart, and she echoed the words, mournfully—"He is dead!"

"They killed him in the big woods," continued Hondurah's daughter. "The mad young braves, headed by Omaha, took him from the prison-lodge last sleep, and put fire about him."

Silver Rifle started.

Was the girl referring to Ahdeek, the half-breed?

She would know.

"What was Ahdeek to Clearwater?"

"Her sunlight."

"He slew her people."

"But he loved Clearwater. He would kiss her in the aisles of the forest, and they have sat by the shores of Gitche Gumee, when Hondurah hunted for the White Tiger."

"Did Clearwater know that there were two White Tigers?" asked Silver Rifle.

Ahdeek could keep nothing from Clearwater, he loved her so. He told her that the ring was given him by an old man whose beard was white with the snows of many winters, and that he was to take it to a white girl, who lived beyond the big waters, when he had killed an Indian for every drop of blood which they had spilled from the old pale face's veins."

"Is that all he told Clearwater?"

"Yes—no. Old white-beard have much yellow money, which he give to trapper Snowbeard to keep, and papers with writing on, too, he said. Indians kill Snowbeard, and burn down house; so yellow money and talking-papers all gone!"

Silver Rifle sighed.

"Did pale girl see Indians burn Ahdeek?" asked Clearwater, suddenly looking up into her face.

"No. I saw him escape; but Oagla struck me when I cheered the brave fellow on, and when I opened my eyes again we were near the village. So they must have recaptured Ahdeek, and burned him, while I was unconscious."

Clearwater's head dropped upon her bosom, and the Girl Trailer heard her murmur away down in her heart:

"Poor, poor Ahdeek!"

"Clearwater, will Oagla find the ring?" asked Silver Rifle, rousing the Indian girl from her reverie.

"Oagla see like eagle, his braves like hawks," was the response; "but ring hard to find in big woods. Clearwater hate all young braves now. Omaha never call her squaw. He know she love Ahdeek, and he thought he would kill him; then Clearwater must turn to him. But he miss mark very far. He better not cross Clearwater's path in the forest; she always carry rifle on her shoulder."

The white teeth met with vengeance over the last words, and Silver Rifle looked proudly down upon the loveless girl.

"Silver Rifle have to tell Indians that Nahma and Rena-dah died by her hand," said Clearwater, after a long pause.

"Why, sister?"

"That right. Clearwater and Silver Rifle sisters now. She have to save one who was nothing to her."

A blush mantled the white girl's cheeks.

"Ha!" cried Clearwater, smiling, "Hondurah's child speak wrong. White Tiger is something to Silver Rifle."

"Girl, I never talked with him until this day."

Quickly Clearwater placed her hand on Silver Rifle's breast, and with a curious face looked up as she felt the pulsations of the heart.

"Heart beat fast when Clearwater talk of White Tiger," said the Indian girl. "Silver Rifle shall not die when Oagla come back."

"Who can save me, girl?"

"Silver Rifle shall not die when Oagla come back," repeated the girl, with emphasis.

"Shall *he* die, then?"

"Silver Rifle see," and, with sudden impulse, the chief's daughter sprung from the cot, and stepped to the door. She parted the curtains, and stood face to face with her father.

"Young braves talking bad talk in their lodges," said Hondurah, as he entered his own wigwam. "But they won't take prisoners to the hollow to-night. Hondurah stand by strong lodge himself, and Yucata with his old braves and Clearwater guard Silver Rifle."

The Indian girl crept back to the captive's couch and whispered:

"Clearwater shoot mad buck when he was driving his horns through Yucata."

“Oagla throw ring somewhere here. He see big oak there, when he throw ring into medicine-bag and pulled out the yellow talker. Braves, separate now, and look sharp. Let your eyes rival the hawk’s, and do not leave an inch of ground unsearched. Oagla must find ring, or—or—” He turned abruptly, and finished the sentence in a whisper: “Or Hondurah steps upon the death-trail. Oagla will never submit to having his feathers torn from his head!”

The party of discovery had reached a portion of the forest which the captors of Silver Rifle, led, as the reader has seen, by Oagla, had traversed a few hours before. The trees stood in profusion here and to some extent lent a gloomy coloring to the ground.

Oagla had concluded that hereabouts he had tossed aside the mysterious ring, without the knowledge of Silver Rifle, never expecting that lie would be compelled to hunt for it, with a disgraceful reward promised for non-success.

He had a presentiment that the ring boded him no good, for he had witnessed the fate of Hawkeye, and, to dissipate such thoughts, he had rid himself of the bauble in a summary manner.

The party reached the spot I have briefly described about high noon, and until four o’clock they scoured the ground in vain for the missing ring.

“Wait till the pale queen shines,” said Oagla, suddenly pausing. “Then the little talker will be bright, and the Chippewa can find him easily.”

So the hunt was suspended, and the savages waited for the rising of the moon, which was full and scaled the horizon quite early.

Shadow after shadow gathered among the trees, and the ring-hunters hailed the first approach of the moon with great joy. Her silvery beams dissipated the shadows, and streaming down through the leafy boughs, clothed the ground in a weird light.

Freshened by their rest, the Indians sprung with alacrity to the hunt again, which had scarcely been inaugurated when Omaha darted to the foot of a stunted fir, and stooped, with a wild cry of delight.

Raising quickly, he turned, and someth'ng glittered in his upraised hand.

It was the ring!

The Chippewas darted toward him with joyful shouts, and soon Omaha stood in the center of the wild band.

"Now!" cried Oagla, "warriors, back to your lodges. Omaha give Oagla the little talker. He not throw it away now. He—"

The sharp crack of a rifle benumbed every sense, and Omaha reeled from Oagla, whose hand was outstretched to grasp the ring!

And as he reeled, a death-yell pealed from his lips.

Then there was a quick step, a dark figure dashed through the red ranks, jerked the bauble from Omaha's dead fingers, and was away like a rocket!

All this occupied but a single minute, and when the savages recovered their self-possession, they were staring into each other's faces.

"Swear!" cried Oagla, in thunder tones, "swear, warriors, that in the village of your people, you will never speak the name of Omaha's slayer! Swear that you will never breathe it to the old warriors."

In the ghastly moonlight, and by the name of their Great Spirit, the Indians swore.

"It is well," said Oagla. "The little talker is gone. Warriors, to your lodges!"

Then, biting his lips with disappointment, he threw himself before his braves and turned his face toward the south.

The ring had fallen into the hands of one entirely unlooked for!

CHAPTER VIII.

ESCAPING.

Oagla's band reached the Indian village about nine at night.

They placed the corpse of Omaha on a mat in the center of the council-house, and when the population of the town

swarmed about it with vengeful looks and mutterings, the chief rose and addressed the assemblage.

He said that a great night bird, with sharp eyes, had darted from a tree and seized the ring as he was about to pick it up, and that they had followed the feathered thief through the woods until he flew toward the lake, and thus they lost sight of him. Omaha was shot, he said, by an unseen foe, of whose person they were unable to get a single glimpse.

All this, as the reader knows, was a cunning lie. The elder warriors drank it in with great credulity, for Oagla was noted for veracity; but the younger braves whispered to one another, and glanced with faint smiles at the red speaker.

Probably a trader, who had escaped the late massacre, was the slayer, as Oagla suggested, and Hondurah swore to hunt the avenger down.

The gathering broke up with the decision that the white trio should be tortured during the coming day, and a few Indians remained to wrap Omaha in his blankets and bury him.

The young men had promised that the captives should not be disturbed during the night; but Hondurah, who had seen so many like promises broken, smiled knowingly as he shook his feathered head, and stationed the guards as he had previously designated.

Silver Rifle saw six dark forms encircle her lodge, and heard Hondurah tell them that their lives would be taken by his hatchet if she escaped. Sternly the war-tiger of the Chippewas spoke to his daughter; he loved her, he said, but despite the affection she might have for the Girl Trailer, if she assisted her to evade the stake, he would give her, his only child, over to the vengeance of his people.

The interior of the chieftain's lodge was clothed in Cimmerian darkness. Clearwater said that Silver Rifle wanted to sleep, and dream for the last time of the birds and flowers that sung and grew beyond the straits of Gitche Gumee.

Several hours passed away, and nothing came to disturb the Indian village. Even the noisy dogs were silent; but Clearwater sat before her father's lodge, and conversed in low tones with Yucata.

That she had broached a subject which was quite unpleasant to the old commander of the guards, was noticeable in his

countenance, and many times he slowly shook his head while she talked with her lips close to his ear.

"Yucata owes Clearwater a life," said the old Indian, in a low tone; "but he can not meet Hondurah in the light, and say 'Silver Rifle outwitted him.' No, no!"

"Then let Yucata go, too; Pontiac fights the English at Detroit; let him join his king, and fall, if he falls at all, with his face to the red-coats."

"Yucata will do as Clearwater has said," said the Indian, suddenly starting forward. "Now, let her go to her work."

Quickly Clearwater sprung to her feet and re-entered the lodge, from which, half an hour later, she emerged and walked rapidly away.

When she had disappeared, Yucata summoned his sub-alterns to his side, and composedly lit his pipe.

"The white girl sleeps," he said. "Clearwater has gone to weep over the grave of Omaha, for whom her young heart bled."

The savages seated themselves on the ground before the lodge, and Yucata led them into an animated discussion of the war which was then raging. The old chief seemed to advance strange ideas, for the sake of argument, and so intently were the Indians engaged in their war-talk, that the dark, girlish figure that glided through a long slit in the rear of the lodge, walked away erect and unnoticed.

The savages continued to talk, and at last a sub-chief, who was relating a story, suddenly paused in the midst of his narrative.

The hoot of an owl which emanated from the adjoining forest had caused the interruption.

Yucata started and raised his head.

"'Tis something," he whispered. "Yucata will see the eyes of that owl," and cautioning his braves to watch the lodge, but not to disturb the occupant, he rose to his feet and hurried away.

Once beyond his companions, he walked faster than ever, and all at once turned to the left and ran at the top of his speed. He soon reached the last lodge that stood in the northern portion of the village, and waived a farewell with his hand.

"Yucata traitor to Hondurah," he said ; "but Clearwater brought his oath back, and he could not forget it. Yucata never come back here any more."

Then he turned again, plunged into the wood, and was lost to view.

The owl-hoot meant much.

It told Yucata that he might fly from the lodge which had sheltered him long, and that the cunning of one woman had outwitted the sharpest chief of the Chippewa nation.

"Lead us to the lake, girl," said a low, but strong voice. "Once there, we'll defy the sagacity and bravery of your people. I want to be loose once more ; I want to remind the scarlet fiends that they have tortured Ahdeek."

A sorrowful sigh escaped the lips of the figure that walked beside the speaker, and she paused and touched his arm.

"Look up, White Tiger."

He obeyed.

A single star glittered overhead, the others were obscured by clouds.

"That s'ar, Ahdeek," said a whispered voice. "He tells Clearwater not to spare young braves. She spare 'em not."

Four figures flitted through the darkness that enwrapped the Indian village ; they were Clearwater, Silver Rifle, the White Tiger, and Doc Cromer, the trader.

Clearwater had led the trio to comparative freedom. Her cunning had outwitted her own father, and, like Yucata's braves, he guarded an empty lodge. The hunters were not unprepared for rescue, for, during the day, Clearwater, while talking to a dandyfied brave who guarded the lodge, had managed to smuggle a piece of bark to the captives, upon which were traced Indian characters which, from their acquaintance with savage life, they easily deciphered.

By a stratagem Hondurah and his warriors were thrown off their guard, for the old chief did not dream that his daughter would attempt treachery before his very eyes, and presently the whites found themselves free.

Noiselessly they left the hoodwinked Indians, and soon joined a single figure, dressed like Clearwater. It was Silver Rifle.

Then the owl-hoot which drove Yucata away pealed from Clearwater's throat, and the quartette moved on.

One or two Indian dogs which came smelling about them were noiselessly dispatched, and, as the party reached the summit of a knoll, and were beginning to breathe freer, they came upon the burial of Omaha.

The best trail to the lake led by the Chippewa burying-ground, and the night interment of the slain savage was unknown to the chief's daughter. Several torches threw their ghostly light upon the scene, and the escaping party dropped to the earth which they hugged closely, and watched the burial.

They were within thirty feet of the group, and held their breath while the Indians lowered Omaha into his grave, encumbered, as he was, by his rifles, hatchets, knives, and well-stocked medicine bag.

"We must go," whispered Doc Cromer; "they will smoke over him, and pow-wow an hour. Let us try the right. Tell the gal."

The Destroyer spoke to Clearwater.

"We must crawl like the cat," she said. "Clearwater would sooner wait till the Indians go. But she will lead the pale faces to the right, on a little trail covered with leaves."

Slowly and painfully, then, the four vacated their position, and with eyes fixed on the Indians, crawled down to the right. Fortune favored them, however, and they were congratulating themselves, when the most terrible adventure of the night occurred.

The party was suddenly brought to a halt by a low sign of danger from Clearwater, who led the van.

They were crossing a spot of ground upon which dimly fell the light of the funeral torches.

"What's up?" whispered Doc Cromer, who covered the little band.

"Somebody's abroad," answered the young avenger. "We lie on the brink of destruction now."

The footsteps which had startled Clearwater's acute ear came nearer, and told that something was walking painfully slow.

It came from the north west, directly toward the breathless quartette, who gripped their knives with determination.

At last they saw the outlines of the night-hawk.

It was an Indian.

He was making for the torches of his scarlet brethren, and our imperiled ones felt a sense of relief when they beheld him swerve to the right and bid fair to miss them.

The brilliant eyes of the solitary red-man saw nothing but the tableau over the grave; but he was soon called to another scene.

The eyes of Silver Rifle had been riveted upon him from the first, and when his every feature became plainly visible, when he could have touched her with his hand, a terrible cry rose from her lips, and she leaped to her feet, looking like one who had suddenly encountered a ghost.

The Indian stopped, and the next moment Doc Cromer, like a tiger, sprung upon him.

The red-man was as a babe in the grip of the stout trader; but he shrieked before the great brown hand closed over his mouth!

To the ground went white and red, and Silver Rifle leaped toward them as the Indians turned from Omaha's grave.

"My God! girl, what have you done?" cried the White Tiger, springing up and cocking his rifle, as he glanced from their enemies at Silver Rifle.

She did not hear him, for she was trying to pull Doc Cromer from the Chippewa.

"Don't kill him, Doc," she cried. "He saved me, and he's—"

The trader sprung erect.

"I've choked the skeleton to death, I guess," he said, looking down upon the savage, who lay motionless at his feet. "What made you holler fur?"

He shot her a maddened look, as he put the question, not destined to be answered then, and turned as two rifles cracked at his side. He saw a brace of Indians drop in the woods, and then the remainder of the band sprung to trees.

"We must run!" cried the White Tiger. "The whole village will be down here in a minute."

The next moment the quartette turned and dashed toward the lake, still three miles distant.

"You've dropped one—I haven't," cried Cromer, pausing in his race for life. "I must kill one greaser afore day, with the rifle. Choking red-skins to death is no fun."

He faced the pursuing savages, some fifteen in number, who, confident of an easy capture, were following with torches through the thinly-timbered wood, and threw his rifle to his shoulder.

"Quick, Doc, quick! We're losing time!" cried the Destroyer.

"Hold a moment," was the calm reply. "I want to bore a brain!"

Seemingly not realizing their danger, the rash trader took matters very calmly, and, as his finger touched the trigger, Webb leaped forward with a startling cry.

"A panther!"

As he shrieked the name of the beast, he hurled the trader aside, completely spoiling his aim.

The next second a yellow body alighted on the spot where Cromer had stood.

"Curse your yellow hide!" yelled the mad hunter, as with uplifted rifle he bounded upon the animal. "I'll teach you how to interfere with my business."

The rifle descended, the panther received the blow on his head, and staggered back with an almost human groan.

With a glance at the Indians, the trader sprung over the stunned brute, and rejoined his friends.

"Now for life!" said Webb. "This delay may prove dangerous."

The words had scarcely left his lips when the forest resounded with rifle-shots, and Clearwater dropped over a fallen sapling.

The Destroyer darted to her side and raised her up.

A stream of blood gushed from her mouth, and all at once she threw her arms about his neck, completely depriving him of his balance. He went to the ground beneath the wounded girl, and Doc Cromer and Silver Rifle sprung to his aid.

The trader jerked the Indian loose, and then leaped forward, with an oath.

The savages were upon them!

Boldly among the red demons sprung the trio, fighting with that determination and despair of a person driven to the wall.

The trader had dropped two warriors, when a tomahawk,

thrown by a young brave, struck him in the head, and he dropped his rifle, as he sunk back without a groan.

"Girl," cried the White Tiger, who had witnessed the fall of the trader, "we can but die; then let us fall in the run for life."

Suddenly they whirled to the right, and parrying several blows, furiously given, dashed through an opening, which they had made in the red ranks, and darted toward the lake once more.

The Indians were surprised at this move, and for a moment could not realize the unexpected state of affairs.

That moment proved of value to the fugitives; they had put many rods between them and their foes, and after a chase which terminated near the lake-shore, the latter returned bootless to the scene of battle.

Here they were greeted with mystery and horror. Their dead had been scalped during the last pursuit; the body of Clearwater was missing, and upon the giant tree at whose foot she had lain, was the dreaded mark of the White Tiger, lately cut, with a bloody tomahawk!

The warriors gathered around the tree with bated breath, and stared at the deeply-cut double cross.

"Clearwater plays the White Tiger," said a young brave, at length.

"Clearwater!" yelled a gray-haired chief, turning fiercely upon the speaker. "Clearwater's arm was weak, and the tomahawk went through the bark. A man's muscle drove the hatchet;" and then, raising his thunderous voice to its highest pitch, he swept the young braves with a finger of scorn. "Chopah knows all!" he cried. "The young warriors have lied!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE INDIAN DOGS.

THE first shots which the red grave-diggers fired at the escaping party roused the Indian village.

The braves who guarded Hondurah's empty lodge sprung to their feet and listened intently.

Suddenly the sound of hasty feet greeted their ears, and a moment the sachem halted before them. He did not speak, but darted to the lodge, and throwing wide the curtains, leaped across the threshold.

Then a cry of rage and disappointment cleft the darkness of the lodge. The guards turned as Hondurah reappeared.

"Where Yucata?" he demanded.

"Gone to catch the owl that hooted."

"Where Clearwater?"

"Gone to see Omaha put in the ground."

For a moment the chief was silent.

"Hear rifles in the dark woods?" he said, half interrogatively, and while he finished the sentence, the shots were repeated.

"The pale-faces are in the forest," he cried. "We catch 'em 'fore day," and after issuing a few necessary orders, he and ten warriors hastened to the scene of conflict; and a moment after the denunciation which, at the close of our last chapter, rung from Chopah's lips, they reached the scene of danger and death.

"What means this?" demanded Hondurah, striding into the midst of the baffled party. "Did Chopah allow the pale worms to crawl away? Where are they now? Where is Hondurah's child?"

His glance fell upon the recumbent forms, and a moment later he sprung to the motionless body of the tomahawked trader.

"Ha!" he cried; "the trader never trade by Gitche Gumez

any more. He kill last Chippewa: there, take that, white dog!"

With the last word, he bestowed a brutal kick on the body and turned to his braves again.

"Chopah, tell Hondurah all," he commanded; and turning from the young braves whom he had called liars, Chopah, with folded arms, faced his sachem.

Intently Hondurah listened to the narrative until Chopah mentioned the name of his child.

Then he started forward and touched the speaker's arm.

"Clearwater help whites?"

Chopah nodded.

"No, no, Chopah, don't tell Hondurah this;" and for a moment the chief hid his eyes in his hands. "Do not tell him that Clearwater is a traitress."

"Chopah never hides the truth," was the reply reluctantly given. "The young braves—the braves who have lied—will say that Chopah speaks the right words. Braves—"

He paused suddenly, for the young warriors were gone! One by one, silent and sullen, they had sneaked unperceived from the spot, unable to withstand the anger of Hondurah, when Chopah should denounce them.

Hondurah smiled faintly at the chief's consternation.

"Let them go," said the latter chief. "They have basely deceived us, and at some other time they shall pay the penalty attached to deception. Clearwater fell beneath the aim of Chopah's braves," continued the chief; "but while we pursued the White Tiger and his tigress, a man came and stole her, and tore from their heads the scalps of our braves."

"How does Chopah know that a man came?"

"By the mark on the tree."

The tomahawk pointed to the White Tiger's mark, and Hondurah stepped nearer and examined it.

"The White Tiger was far away when this was cut?" he asked, curiously.

"He was hunted by Chopah, who heard his flying feet in the forest."

"Then," said Hondurah, "*he* lives!"

"The young braves have lied," hissed Chopah, gritting his teeth, as he gazed upon the mark.

Hondurah folded his arms, drew himself to his full bight, and fastened his eye upon the terrible double cross.

His warriors watched him narrowly, and saw the sinews of anger, black and terrible, that swept across his face.

"Hondurah," he said at length, "is father to a snake. That snake may live, for he would hardly bear a corpse away. Warriors, Hondurah is a father no more; he is an avenger. Throw yourselves upon the trails of the pale-faces; but do not touch Clearwater. When you find her hiding-place, speed swiftly to Hondurah, for he, and he alone, shall punish the traitress.

"Will he slay his own child?" asked an old warrior, meekly.

"Question not Hondurah," was the stern reply. "Seek the white-faces. He will hunt the traitress, whose fate shall be more terrible than the wolf's when the brave has trapped him. Watch now the caves of Gitche Gumee. Throw yourselves at once upon the trail, and if Yucata crosses it, strike him dead and bring his scalp to me."

With the last word the chief turned toward the village.

"What would Hondurah do?" questioned Chopah.

"Punish the young braves."

"Beware, Hondurah," said the chief. "The young braves are strong; they will strike back if Hondurah raises his hand. Let them go."

The chief did not speak; but the silent motion of his lips seemed to frame that determined word, "Never!"

Chopah shook his head to his warriors, as Hondurah turned for the second time.

He knew that his nation would soon be sachemless if Hondurah lifted an arm against the younger warriors, who certainly needed punishment for an act to be revealed hereafter.

"We divide here," said Chopah, after a brief consultation. "The trail of the scalper is plain. Clearwater's blood stained the leaves. The White Tiger rests in one of Gitche Gumee's caves. We must hunt him there."

A few moments later the band divided. Chopah and six braves threw themselves upon the fugitives' trail, while ano-

ther chief, with a like number of savages, followed the blood-marks that crimsoned the forest grass.

Soon the forest resumed its ghostly stillness, and for several hours it was not disturbed.

Then a convulsive movement of Doc Cromer's arm snapped a twig, and the hand essayed to wipe the blood from his face.

And in the demi-gloom he raised his body on his elbow and looked about. His eyes fell upon the motionless forms of the four dead braves, and with great effort he crawled to each.

"Dead, by hokey!" he ejaculated, with eminent satisfaction. "Here's the chap what I dropped afore the hatchet spoiled my face; but who's gone an' scalped 'em?"

In the pale moonlight the trader had discovered that the corpse was scalpless, and this excited his wonder.

Surely White Tiger and Silver Rifle did not defeat the savages after his fall, else he would not have been left there, even though he had been killed.

"I can't fathom it," he said, after a lengthy silence, "and I won't try any more. Now, the next thing is to get out of this. Jehu, but I'm as weak as a weasel. I must have lost a barrel of blood. My face won't bleed any more just now, for the blood is hard and shuts the gash."

Then, with the help of a tree, the trader drew himself to his feet, and tried to walk away; but found himself too weak for the undertaking.

"I've got to crawl," he reluctantly admitted, lowering himself to the ground again. "By heaven, if I ever git over this, somebody'll hev to suffer."

He robbed one of the dead Indians of his knife, and then crawled away.

It was a fearful strait to be in. At any moment his actions might betray him to vindictive enemies, and he could expect no mercy at their hands. He brooded over vengeance as he moved along through the forest, as he thought, toward the lake.

"This is slow work," he said, a thousand times. "I hope I'll be strong enough to walk like a man after a while. The lake can't be far off now, for it is near daylight, and—heavens!"

Well might the trader utter the ejaculation and shrink back, for his hand had fallen upon a bare and icy arm!

He drew a long breath before he advanced, and then it was with a curse.

"'Tis the greaser I choked to death," he said. "Here I've been crawling in the wrong direction all the time. What brought me back to this thing?" and, with a sigh of vexation, he threw himself beside the dead.

"It isn't any harm to kill an Injun," said the trader, with a smile, which looked ghastly on his bloody face; "but this fellow was sick, for he was as weak as the weasel's kittens. I wonder if he hasn't some pemmican about 'im. I'm hungry, an' while I rest hyar, I might as well take a supper."

So the Indian's medicine-bag was drawn from beneath the body, and Doc Cromer's hand disappeared among its contents.

"There's not much hyar," he said; "not an ounce of pemmican; but what's this?"

Quickly he withdrew his hand, and bent forward to examine the object it clutched.

The prize glittered like gold in the rays of the moon, and all at once a strange cry pealed from the trader's lips.

"Well, what's goin' to happen me next?" he exclaimed. "Hyar's Silver Rifle's ring—in the medicine-bag of the greaser what I choked to death, when she war at my side! Say, Injun," and he turned toward the corpse, "whar you run 'cross this? Blast yer ugly picture, ef you don't tell I'll knife you, I will, by hokey!"

He shook the body violently, and then laughed at his folly.

"Well, I've got the ring, anyhow," he said, "and, by heavens! I'm goin' to deliver it to the gal in person. I'm not goin' to die hyar! no! Doc Cromer, suthin' guided you to this spot—suthin' we don't know any thing about."

He started at the sound of his own voice, so singularly harsh and strong, and rose to his feet without great effort.

"I'll strike the lake trail this time," he murmured. "If I kin but reach the cave, I'll be strong in a little while."

Then he moved off, but suddenly came to a halt.

"Hyar they come; them infernal Indian dogs!" he hissed,

listening to the tramp of many feet, and the yells that resounded throughout the forest. "I thinned their ranks when I war trappin'; but since the boys are all dead, the dogs will increase. They're half-starved, I kin tell by their yelps, and they're comin' d'rectly toward me!"

The trapper hugged a tree, and listened to the noise of the troop.

The animals—many of which were half-wolf, were snapping and snarling at each other, and ready to tear to pieces any animated object which obstructed their path. The Chippewa dogs, tired of gnawing bones around the lodges, often made incursions into the forest, where they sometimes met and gave battle to their brother—the wolf. More than one Indian had fallen a prey to the wild dogs, when returning from an unsuccessful foray, and of late the young braves had dispatched large numbers of the brutes, when they could do so without its coming to the knowledge of their several owners.

On came the half-starved dogs, and Doc Cromer held his breath.

"They haven't tasted meat for days," he said, "and, thank Heaven! they're passin' me to the right!"

His ejaculation of joy was quickly followed by an exclamation of terrible anxiety.

The dogs had scented him and had paused.

He dare not move; the slightest action would betray him to the beasts, and he seemed some dark excrescence in the body of the tree.

All at once the leader of the troop, a huge half-wolf dog, walked slowly toward him!

Cromer uttered an oath, and gripped his knife firmer than ever.

But a prolonged and peculiar whistle brought the dog to a halt.

His master was calling him!

A dozen like whistles followed the first, and the trader beheld the famished canines stand irresolute.

Had the Indians discovered him, or were they young braves who wished to call the troop nearer, that they might pour a deadly volley into their ranks?

"Heaven keep them from me!" he cried; "but if—they're comin' fur me, by Jehu!"

The leader had turned to the trader again, for the calls had died away, and with the nerve characteristic of the trapper and fur-buyer of the lakes, he awaited the onset.

On one of the fingers of the left hand, thrown slightly forward as a shield, glittered Silver Rifle's fateful ring, while below the tightly clenched members of the right, there was the soft gleaming of yet bloodless steel.

Suddenly, with a half wolfish howl, the big dog sprung forward, upward.

The next instant there was blood on Doc Cromer's blade, and the mad beasts were leaping at him from all sides.

CHAPTER X.

DANGER AND DELIVERANCE.

THE savages, as has been seen, pursued the White Tiger and Silver Rifle to the edge of the forest, when the chase was given up, and the fugitives rejoiced to find themselves at liberty.

"We will not remain unmolested long," said the youth, when they found themselves near the girl's cave. "Having slain Ahdeek and the trader, the red fiends will give no rest to their feet until they have run us to earth."

"They will certainly attempt to run us down," replied the girl, calmly. "But when they bring Marie Knight to bay, they may lose some warriors."

"So, then, you are a Knight?"

"Yes."

"And you came hither in quest of the ring?"

"And a father," finished the girl. "But he must be dead, else that half-breed would never have worn the ring. Did he ever tell you any thing about the ring?"

"But little, girl. He told me that it was a talking ring—that it was given him by an old man whom the Indians slew; that after he had avenged the old man's death, he would seek

you beyond the lakes and give you the ring that would tell you who you are."

For a moment the girl was silent.

"But," she said, looking up, disappointedly, "the ring is lost, and I will never know who I am."

"Where is your mother?" asked the White Tiger, kindly.

"Dead."

"Would she not tell you any thing?"

"She told me that on the shores of Lake Superior dwelt a man who possessed a ring which held my life mystery, and on her death-bed she bade me hunt him and demand the ring in her name, which he would restore. She intimated that that man was my father, and I believe he was. My mother would never speak of the past, and whenever I would ask where father was, she would point to the North-west and say, 'Yonder, perhaps.' I left Ontario after her death, and once, in these woods, encountered Ahdeek, your brother. He darted by me like a rocket; but I saw a ring on his finger, and knew that it was mine. How I trailed him then; how, not knowing that I was in the country, he eluded me. But," with a sigh, "the trail is near an end."

"Girl, I will hunt for the ring," said the White Tiger, quickly following her last word. "You shall solve the mystery of your life. The ring shall be recovered, though in the search I tramp these woods till doomsday—though the trail leads into the jaws of death, the mouth of hell."

The girl stopped sudden in the starlight, and put forth her hand.

"You are brave!" she said, her great blue eyes sparkling with tear-pearls. "I have not deserved such sacrifice at your hands. But, sir, give the ring to me, and I will reward you as best I can."

He returned the pressure which she bestowed, and held her hand until, blushing, she withdrew it, and told him that they had best proceed.

They entered her cave-home with extreme caution, and, to their relief, found it tenantless. The gloom was dissipated by the flint, and igniting a bunch of bark films, Silver Rifle led her companion to the southern corner of the cavern.

"I'll tell you why I shrieked when that Indian crossed our

trail in the forest," she said, pointing to an excavation at their feet. "'Twas here that I buried Dohma and Renadah. See, but one remains—'tis the giant. Dohma escaped from his tomb, and when I beheld him in the wood, believing him a ghost, I betrayed our presence. I wonder if the trader killed him?"

"He is dead; they never escape whom Doc Cromer chokes," answered the White Tiger, shuddering at the thought of man digging out of his own grave. "He has repeatedly choked panthers to death, so, of course, there is no hope for the Indian."

"Oh, had I but known that Dohma was not dead when I buried him!" said the girl, in genuine regret. "But he lay so still that I was completely deceived. He saved my life, as I have told you, and I would have rewarded him. We will hope that Cromer did not slay him."

"Are there no avenues of escape from this cave save that by water?" asked the youth, when they had returned to the fire.

"There is one other," was the reply, "and I will make you acquainted with it."

So she drew a torch from the fire, which they deadened, and led the way from the main cavern. Past the grave of Renadah and into a narrow, rocky corridor the twain walked, and, after many tortuous windings, felt the cool lake breeze on their faces.

"We have journeyed three miles under ground," said the girl, thrusting her torch around a rock, that its light might not attract the attention of foes who, perhaps, were abroad on the lake. "There are places in the corridor where we could successfully defend ourselves against a tribe of red-men. We are below the pictured rocks now, having passed almost directly beneath the chapel. I seldom use this entrance, because bears and panthers have been known to lodge in the corridor, and I would not encounter the brutes unawares. Shall we return now?"

"Yes, it is getting light on the water," said the youth, "and perhaps our presence is needed in the great cave."

"I hope no one has entered during our absence. Dohma, to my knowledge, was the first Indian who ever visited it; then came Renadah."

"It seems fatal for Indians to visit here," said Dorsey Webb, with a smile. "Hitherto they have met with a warm reception, which is not encouraging for the red man."

The torch was lifted again, fanned into a good blaze, and they started back. The journey was accompanied with much toil; there were masses of broken rock to surmount, and near two hours were spent in thefeat."

Suddenly Silver Rifle reached forward, and took the torch from her companion's hand.

"What is it?" he asked, in a low whisper, believing that she had discovered something.

"I heard nothing," was the reply. "We must extinguish the fire now, for we are very near the mouth of the cave."

He did not reply, but saw the torch put out and dragged at her side.

"Hist!"

Silver Rifle's lips touched his ear as she spoke the premonition of danger, and he instantly became as motionless as a statue.

The tread of moccasined feet was heard, and they divined that somebody was groping along the western wall of the cavern, which was very uneven, and provided with stony shelves.

The person appeared to be searching for some particular object, for by running his hand along the shelves, he threw multitudinous pieces of broken stalactites to the ground, from which emanated ringing sounds as they struck.

But one person to all appearances tenanted the cavern, and the twain in the corridor listened intently until they were startled by sounds in their rear.

Silver Rifle clutched the Destroyer's arm.

He instantly divined the cause of the gripe, for he had been listening to the sounds before they became so distinct as to cause alarm.

"Indians in our rear, and the cavern," she whispered
"What is to be done?"

"Much, and that quickly," was the low reply. "This fellow in the cave is approaching. What can he be looking for?"

"Heaven knows," breathed Silver Rifle; "he must know

that we have lately vacated the cave, else he would use a torch. But—”

The Destroyer's hand closed gently over her mouth, and broke the sentence, and the next moment she felt him leave her side.

A cry of surprise, the fall of a heavy body quickly followed the leap, and the short, sharp struggle that succeeded was quickly over.

The girl sprung forward and landed at White Tiger's side. “I've killed him,” lie cried. “Now we must fight the devils in the corridor.”

There was no time to look, for the savages who had followed them from the lake shore were quite near, and, as the couple waited for them to turn a curve that they might fire, a low, angry growl issued from the corridor.

“They've roused a bear among the rocks,” said Silver Rifle, “and the beast is being driven down upon us. He has turned the bend now; I hear him among the loose rocks; wait till the Indians follow his example. There! they're around now. Ready—shoot low to kill Bruin if possible—fire!”

Simultaneously the rifles cracked, and the howl of brute and humanity were blended in the darkness.

The next instant the youth sprung to the smoldering fire, and a kick illuminated the cavern with a dim light, which revealed the mouth of the corridor, beside which Silver Rifle stood with ready weapon.

The entrance was scarcely large enough to admit of the passage of a bear, and two persons stationed there could defend it against numbers of an enemy.

The bear had been wounded, and a moment after the shots, he turned with a howl of pain upon the Indians, who rose with cries of horror, and poured a volley into the infuriated beast. They shot at random, for they could not see him; but some of the shots took effect, and more painful howls followed. Then suddenly, with the impetuosity of a thunderbolt, he sprung past the young besieged, and confronted them with menacing attitude and defiant growls in the light of the flickering fire.

Here was a new danger, a new enemy to be met, and the

new antagonist showed fight, and even moved slowly toward our friends at the mouth of the corridor.

Silver Rifle glanced at the young Destroyer, and then raised her rifle.

He saw this, then was compelled to look away, for the Indians were moving in the corridor again.

A moment later the report of a rifle resounded throughout the cave, and the bear rose on his hind feet, and with his front limbs extended like a two-legged monster, came forward to take vengeance for the shot which had plowed a terrible furrow through his eye.

Straight at the girl darted the brute, and retreating to the edge of the corridor with drawn knife, our heroine prepared for the battle.

She glanced at the Destroyer, who, with a low cry, recognized her danger and leaped toward the animal!

In a second he thrust his rifle forward, till it struck bruin's breast with a dull thud, when his finger pressed the trigger.

There was a groan, the great head dropped upon the black breast, and the vanquished terror of the forest dropped dead at Silver Rifle's feet.

Then, as the victors turned to the corridor again—for the scene which I have just described occupied but a minute—a dark, elongated form leaped into the cavern.

White Tiger struck as it rose erect before him, and a savage reeled away with a low cry, indicative of death. Another and another Indian made their appearance, and after a desperate resistance, Silver Rifle and the White Tiger found themselves captives once more. Their captors numbered four Chippewas, who quickly assured them that they had caught the glimmer of Silver Rifle's torch from the water, and had pursued, little dreaming, until they found themselves in the corridor, that they were on the trail of their worst enemies.

Two savages had fallen in the conflict in the cavern, and the captives were secured with strong ropes, and thrown upon the ground near the fire, which the Indians had revived.

Young Webb watched the Indians narrowly, and all at once an expression of surprise crossed his face.

The Indian whom he had dispatched in the darkness was nowhere to be seen!

True he had not noticed him after kicking the fire into ^{it} but having struck him a terrible blow on the head with his tomahawk, he had bestowed no second thought upon him, for other and more eventful things demanded his attention.

Now the mystery of the missing body engrossed his every thought. If the savage was a Chippewa, and had recovered from the blow, why did he not make his appearance to his brethren? Why should he depart, when, from some darkened spot, he could shoot his foes, for the Destroyer also noticed that the rifle which he had knocked from his hands was missing also.

Two of the Indians were ransacking the cave, while the others sat by the fire guarding their helpless captives.

Silver Rifle possessed but little for the fiends to take. A rifle or two fell into their hands, and these they brought to their comrades, with many manifestations of ~~del~~.

All at once, while the savages were admiring a head-dress, which they had discovered, one of the men groaned and staggered from the fire.

The captives caught sight of an arrow in his side as he wheeled.

The other savages turned as a rifle cracked, and a figure leaped from the ground with a cry of vengeance.

A second brought the new-comer to his foes, and before they could meet him, two sweeps of the rifle lower them to the ground!

The impetuosity of the sudden attack could not be withstood.

The victor's knife glittered over the prisoners for a moment, then they sprung erect, and recognized their liberator!

Had the dead arisen? After all, was not their rescuer but the ghost of one well known?

No; he was flesh and blood, for the gory furrow of the White Tiger's tomahawk was visible near the temple.

The avenger snatched a brand from the fire, and resumed the search along the rocky shelves.

Silver Rifle and the Destroyer watched him in silence.

At last he turned away, with a cry of mingled disappointment and rage, and flung the torch on the ground.

"Silver Rifle's ring gone again," he said. "Ahdeek laid

it there not long 'go. Somebody stole it. Him Ahdeek hunt now, an' he speak not to Silver Rifle till he find it."

Then, with a maddened glance at the rocks, and a farewell look at the late captives, the half-breed sprung over the dead Indians, and disappeared down the dark throat of the corridor!

"He is gone," said Silver Rifle, recovering her self-possession. "Heaven speed him on his mission."

"So say I, too, girl," said the youth, and then his glance fell upon the slaughtered braves. "I hope these days of blood are drawing to a close. Oh, Heaven, are they not?"

CHAPTER XI.

HONDURAH'S LAST TRAIL.

THE day had but an hour to live.

Already gray shadows were stealing among the trees, and from the lake there came the mutterings of a storm.

It was the evening that followed the morn upon which transpired the final scenes of the foregoing chapter.

A tall, middle-aged Indian stood beside a tree, around whose trunk lay the half-devoured carcasses of a dozen dogs. The limbs of some, the head and entrails of others were gone, and all presented a horrible sight to the chief.

If the features of the Indian were not recognizable in the dusk, the head-dress of gray owl-tails at once proclaimed him Hondurah.

He seemed to have taken a leap of twenty years in a single day, for he was looked upon now as the father of a traitress, not as the chief of the great North-western nation. Then he had punished several of the lying chiefs by stripping them of every insignia of rank, heedless of the venomous scowls they gave him, seemingly not fearing the secret arrow of the future.

"I will go to my unfaithful spawn," he cried, drowning the taunts of the derisive women. "I will show you that

Hondurah can punish his child. I will not return until I can fling at your feet the black scalp of Clearwater."

Then he plunged into the forest, and his first halt was that executed at the spot where the half-starved Indian dogs attacked Doc Cromer. Hondurah knew nothing of the assault; but he saw that a large number of the dogs had fallen before a knife, and for many minutes he searched the ground around the tree.

During this search he discovered that a party of six Indians had rushed upon the brutes, and, while framing other conclusions, he picked up a white man's ear!

It was a terrible trophy, and the chief smiled grimly as he turned it over and over in his hand before wrapping it in buck-skin and depositing it in his medicine-bag.

"White man fight wild-dogs here," he murmured to his satisfaction. "White man lose ear, Injuns take white man, but what do with 'im?"

Unable to answer the question to his satisfaction, the chief moved toward the lake, and presently encountered abundant evidences of the torture-post. A heap of blackened and burned boughs lay at the foot of a young tree, and an investigation revealed a lot of small charred bones.

"Indians burn pale-man here," said the chief. "They save 'im from dogs and burn 'im here, for they 'fraid he git away if they take 'im to village."

As he spoke, he knelt down and began to examine the bones, which proved to be those of animals, intent upon solving a certain inquiry to his satisfaction. He had laid his rifle beside the tree, nor did he dream of danger.

Suddenly he was roused by the snapping of a twig, and whirling instantly, he reached for his rifle, but, to his horror, found it missing.

Then, with a cry of defiance, he leaped to his feet, as two dark figures rounded neighboring trees and threw themselves upon him.

The assaulters were young, lithe, active Indians; but their features were concealed by fox-skin masks.

Hondurah's knife and hatchet were wrested from him, and when he saw that he was completely overpowered, he ceased to struggle, and submitted as quietly as possible.

To his question, "Who binds Hondurah?" a low, sarcastic reply was given, and the chief saw he was in the hands of those who would not scruple to take his life.

They stripped his owl-feathers from his head, tore every insignia of chieftainship from his person, hastily bedaubed him, after the manner of a Green River Indian, with whom the Chippewas were at war, and secured his eyes with a blind-fold.

Then through the wood they urged the chief, and, after two hours' tramp, descended to the stormy lake shore, and filed into a cave whose mouth, so densely packed with young shrubbery, indigenous to the climate, was not visible at a distance of ten feet.

Hondurah could not get a word from his captors, who he felt were the young chiefs whom he had dishonored; but he held his peace, and did not venture to accuse one.

They conducted him a long distance underground, and at last halted in a place which seemed to be quite large.

Presently a torch was introduced, and when the light penetrated the apartment, several savages simultaneously shrunk back, and stared at the figure of a young Indian girl, asleep on the couch.

Hondurah knew that the warriors were excited, and his impatience to learn the cause of that excitement continually increased.

All at once a hand was laid on his arm.

"Hondurah stands over his grave," said one of the masked Indians, in a disguised tone. "Who would he see before he dies?"

The answer came quickly:

"Clearwater."

"And what would he do, then?"

"Kill her! She is a traitress!"

A moment later the skinny bandage fell from the chieftain's eyes, and he beheld one of the masks pointing to the couch.

His eye followed the scarlet finger, and there, peacefully sleeping, unconscious of danger, lay his bunted daughter—Clearwater.

The eyes that peeped from the round holes in the masks

were riveted upon the chief, who could scarcely credit his senses, as his expression indicated.

"Will Honduras keep his word?" asked the spokesman of the conspirators, breaking the almost palpable silence that reigned throughout the cave.

"Yes."

The word cut the air like a knife.

An instant later the right hand of the chief was free, and he accepted the long-bladed knife, which his liberator extended, without a word.

"We have guided Honduras to Clearwater," said the speaking mask. "He swore that she should pay the penalty of treason by his hand. Now let him rid the nation of a traitress—let Honduras go to the Great Spirit with a word well kept on his hands."

The masks drew back now, and with the knife firmly gripped, and stern determination written on every lineament, the chief stepped toward his child, whose sleep was the deepest that ever fell to the lot of woman.

There was a smile on Clearwater's face—a smile which told of a dream of peace, and once an expression of compassion swept over the father's face, as he dropped on one knee beside her couch.

In that second, no doubt, he lived over eighteen years of the past, and a thousand times regretted the oath he had taken. He, himself, stood on the precipice of death; when he had slain his child, the conspirators would coolly take his life, as they had already informed him.

It was a thrilling tableau.

In the father's moment of indecision he heard a half-suppressed mockery of applause.

He glanced upward.

The contemptuous curling of the red lips was enough for him.

Then he turned again and raised the knife; but bent forward and kissed Clearwater's lips.

That kiss startled the girl; she moved and opened her eyes.

Honduras bit his lip, and the blade shot upward for the death-blow.

"Hondurah keeps his word!" he cried. "He will die—"

A rifle-shot terminated the tableau!

Hondurah staggered to his feet, tore the mask from the face of the nearest Indian, and recognized one of the chiefs whom he had reduced.

The Indian pushed Hondurah off; but the red right arm executed a fearful sweep, and the knife cleft the conspirator's heart!

Both Hondurah and the traitor were dead when they touched the ground, and the remaining masks, five in number, turned to fight the new foes, that sprung upon them like a brace of tigers.

The time taken up by Hondurah's death-vengeance seemed but a minute, so rapidly did the several events follow each other, and Clearwater, bewildered to distraction, raised herself on her elbow, and watched the battle above her.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEAD HAND.

THE deceiving braves whom Hondurah had punished had obeyed his injunction.

Accidentally discovering the cave that contained Clearwater, they at once redoubled their search for the vengeful father, who sought her and her half-breed lover, determined that he should keep his vow, and then fall himself for the dishonor he had heaped upon them.

Oagla spoke the truth when he said that Hondurah would rouse the whirlwind if he punished the young braves, and the whirlwind which he did call into existence was destroying, as the reader has just seen.

The torches that dropped from the hands of the savages at the opening of the unexpected attack, afforded light for the combatants, whose features were soon recognized by the Indian girl, too weak to rise and lend assistance.

The onset of the twain was as the onset of the long-con-

cealed tiger—absolutely irresistible. Two Indians went down before the battle fairly commenced, and the remaining three tried to gain the mouth of the corridor. But in vain, for one of the new foes planted himself before the aperture, and with the aid of his confederate beat the red-men back.

"No quarter, girl!" he shouted to his helper, as he sprung forward with uplifted rifle; but the next moment the stock of the weapon was shivered against the roof of the cave, and the barrel flew from his hands.

Quick as thought he sprung forward to reclaim it, and as he stooped the tomahawk of the sole surviving savage descended upon his head, and the great red hand caught him before he could fall.

The Girl Trailer uttered a cry of horror at this, and flew to the White Tiger's relief; but the savage held his prey before him as a shield, leaped backward into the corridor before she could strike, and disappeared in the gloom, like an arrow!

She followed, but soon paused, and returned to kneel over Clearwater, weak with fright and anxiety.

"Oh, Clearwater, I am so glad that you, at least, are left me," she said, taking the hand of the red girl. "The White Tiger and Silver Rifle have parted for the last time!"

Clearwater sighed, and gently pressed the white girl's hand.

"But we will not be alone long," she said. "Ahdeek will return before two more sleeps."

"When was he last here?" asked Silver Rifle, eagerly.

"One sleep ago," was the reply. "He came back to see that Clearwater was comfortable. He placed meat and drink within reach, and kissed her before he left. Yes, he will come back soon with Silver Rifle's ring."

"I pray that he may—but tell me, girl, how you escaped the other night, and why I have believed Ahdeek dead."

"The red man's bullet did not strike Clearwater's heart, and while they chased White Tiger and my white sister, he came where his dead bird lay, scalped the dead braves, and bore her here. Clearwater should live for Ahdeek, the Great Spirit says, and she is growing strong now, and she will soon be on her feet again. The young braves lied," she resumed, after

long pause. "They say they burn Ahdeek; they 'fraid to tell Hondurah and the old men that they let the enemy escape. Ahdeek run faster than Chippewa—they no catch him, the swift young deer of Gitche Gumee."

Thus, in a few words, was the escape of Ahdeek and Clearwater explained by the latter.

Silver Rifle listened attentively, and related the story of the battle in her cave, and Ahdeek's bravery.

"Ahdeek had red gash on his face when he came back to Clearwater," said the Indian girl; "but he no tell her where he got it. He say tomahawk made it; but never say that White Tiger held the bad hatchet."

"Girl, we must prepare for defense," said Silver Rifle, recurring to the present. "The Indian who escaped will not permit us to lie here long unmolested. I know the Chippewas—you know them, too. He will not return alone; but if he finds fellow-braves in the forest, he will step upon the back trail, and Ahdeek will find a bloody cave when he returns."

Silver Rifle's words, so full of startling logic, aroused the chief's daughter.

"Silver Rifle load Indian guns, quick!" she said, commanding. "Mossuit may return before we breathe six times, and he must meet bullets when he crawls through yon hole."

The white girl sprung with alacrity to the task before her. She loaded the six rifles that lay scattered about the cave, and placed them within reach of her red sister.

Clearwater smiled as she examined the locks, and raised one of the weapons, to show Silver Rifle that she was strong enough to handle it.

"Do not excite yourself, Clearwater," said the white girl. "Harbor your strength for the hour which shall demand it. I will return ere long, girl, and then we will wait for the arrival of Ahdeek."

Selecting the best of the rifles—for her own true weapon still remained in the Indian village, and she hoped to recover it some day—she bade Clearwater good-by and plunged into the opening.

The way was dark, but as she had threaded it an hour before, with the Destroyer, she managed to elude many of the unseen dangers, and at length reached the lake-shore.

Death's fateful silence brooded everywhere, but it was the silence that precedes the storm, and Silver Rifle listened keenly as she stood in the gloom, at the mouth of the passage.

"Shall I ascend to the forest?" she asked herself twice, and then answered in the affirmative by stepping forward.

The ascent of the bank was not difficult, and presently the daring girl crouched beneath the boughs of a tree, and strained her ears to catch the slightest sound.

She knew that Indians were abroad; the forests of Lake Superior were never rid of their presence, and she doubted not but that some red prowler would soon manifest himself near.

This thought still lingered in her mind, when a twig snapped and startled her.

It was the first sound that had greeted her ear since leaving the cave.

Was it brute or human?

A long silence followed the noise; then came the sound of a dozen feet.

Six Indians were filing through the woods directly toward the lake.

To rise and return now would be dangerous, for she could not conceal her footsteps from the keen ear of her foe, and, thinking of the peril that menaced Clearwater, she held her breath and resolved to lie still.

She hugged the tree, as the Indians approached, and saw six giant forms glide so near that she could have touched them with her hand!

They did not notice her, and she breathed freer.

Perhaps, after all, their destination was not the cave.

But she started, a moment later, for the savages had halted, and a voice fell upon her ear.

It was the voice of Mossuit, the red fiend who had escaped from the cave with the Destroyer in his arms.

Yes, their destination was the cave, and Mossuit, having disposed of the White Tiger somehow, was leading his brethren to vengeance and death.

The halt occupied but a minute of time, then the red-men moved on.

"They're between me and Clearwater now," groaned the

girl, rising silently. "Heaven help my poor, weak sister, and grant me strength enough to aid her."

With her last words, she gripped her rifle with stern determination, and had taken a step toward the lake, when the sound of a single footstep greeted her ear.

It came from the south, and the owner thereof was on the trail of the Indians.

Quickly, then, Silver Rifle dropped earthward again, and waited for the trailer.

He was eager to come up with the savages, for his speed was considerable, and when Silver Rifle caught the outline of his form, she quickly sprung to her feet, and the next moment thrust forth her hand.

It touched the trailer's bare arm, and he stopped suddenly, like one shot, then stepped back a pace. Silver Rifle followed him.

"Tis I," she whispered, in a low tone.

A cautious ejaculation of surprise followed, and the next moment Silver Rifle and the plumed man stood face to face, with clasped hands.

"The red-men are near Clearwater," he said, with fear.

"Ahdeek came upon them in the forest, and he saw them joined by a chief. He listened, and heard the new chief speak the name of Ahdeek's love. How came Silver Rifle here?"

Three brief sentences told the disguised half-breed all.

He darted forward with a cry of mingled horror and vengeance.

They reached the lake-shore, over which brooded the silence of death.

Not a savage was to be seen, and the half-breed looked puzzled.

"They stationed no braves here," he said; "perhaps, after all, they turned aside, for these bare rocks show no moccasin-steps. Girl, Ahdeek find something in woods."

"My ring—my ring!" ejaculated Silver Rifle, starting forward as Ahdeek's hand sought his medicine-pouch. "Give me the ring, chief, that I may read the mystery of my life."

She trembled with emotion as she watched the hand withdrawn.

A moment later she caught the sparkle of precious stones in the starlight, and her fingers closed upon something cold.

Then she bent eagerly forward, and, with a startling cry, discovered that she gripped a dead hand, lately severed from an arm, and that her ring glittered on one of the icy fingers!

Silver Rifle then did what nine-tenths of her sex would have done—dropped the dead member, and stared into Ahdeek's face.

For the hand was that of a white man!

Ahdeek sprung to pick it up, and, as he stooped, four rifles flashed on the top of the cliff above them!

CHAPTER XIII.

A BLOW FOR A BLOW.

SILVER RIFLE, blinded by the flashes, started back; but the next moment she cocked her gun and sprung with Ahdeek, who, fortunately, had escaped injury, into the mouth of the cave!

"The Chips no shoot good," smiled the half-breed, trying to catch a glimpse of their foes at the risk of his life. "They heard Ahdeek comin' through the wood, so they wait for him on bank, an' shoot at him; not to kill, but to hurt. But, Silver Rifle, where pale hand?"

"I have it, thank Heaven!" said the girl, in tones of satisfaction; "the ring is at last in my possession. Ahdeek, whose hand is it, and how came it in your power?"

"Ahdeek not tell pale girl story now," was the half-breed's response. "He say he find both in the wood—so he did; let that answer satisfy her now. He tell all by 'm by!"

The dead hand lay in the pouch that hung by our heroine's side, and while they guarded the entrance to the cave, she tried to slip the ring from the icy finger. But her efforts were unrealized; the finger clung to the bauble; it pressed it tightly against the palm, and ceasing her labors, she looked up at Ahdeek, whose eyes met hers in the dim starlight.

"Hand bold to ring," he said, with a faint smile. "Ahdeek take it off by 'm by. He find trapper's girl at last. Pretty soon he go an' dig up what Snowbeard buried."

"What do you mean, chief?" said Silver Rifle, eagerly, excitedly. "Your words are clothed in mystery."

"Light come by 'm by," was the reply.

The girl was about to urge the half-breed to explain, when his hand fell lightly upon her arm. She knew the meaning of that touch and remained silent.

Their foes were moving.

For many minutes a dreadful suspense held the watchers in the mouth of the cave. Ahdeek crouched in the gloom, knife in hand, and rifle across his knee. Silver Rifle, too, was ready to encounter the Indians, who they knew were planning some devilish surprise.

The painful silence told this.

"Injun near now," whispered Ahdeek, in the lowest of voices, and then he prepared for a spring.

Silver Rifle held her breath, for it was the decisive moment.

Looking from the cave, they could see the pretty stars that shone upon the lake.

Suddenly the celestial worlds were blotted from their vision.

A mass of humanity had leaped into the aperture.

Ahdeek met it near the entrance, and for several moments the noise of a desperate struggle resounded in the dark passage.

Then the shouts of victory cleft the close, hot air, tinctured with the odor of newly-spilled blood.

The cries were in the Chippewa language!

While Ahdeek was aware of the proximity of his foes, he was not wholly prepared for the tactics which they displayed. They knew that he and Silver Rifle were just beyond the threshold of the corridor, and had decided upon the action which inaugurated the attack. The advantages were with the assaulters, and in a brief time, which had cost the Indians two of their braves, the whites were overpowered and secured.

"Now," cried Mossuit, elated with his triumph, "now

we catch the traitress, and all shall die by the torture."

Down the dark, grim corridor the captors went, bearing their prisoners, whose hands were lashed on their backs, and afforded no hopes of liberty.

"You best not touch Clearwater," hissed Ahdeek, thinking only of the wounded girl, whom he had left on her couch of skins in the cave.

"She shall die!" was the response, "and that before the eyes of her yellow lover."

"Who is not dead yet. Ahdeek swears that the brave who hurts Clearwater shall tread the long trail before the Manitou calls him home."

The savages chuckled audibly over this threat, and examined the captives' bonds to see that they were secure.

Suddenly they halted and placed their prisoners in the van.

This was upon the suggestion of Mossuit, who knew that loaded rifles lay within Clearwater's reach, and that, if strong enough, she would drop the first red-man who showed his face in the cave. Therefore, he shielded himself and braves with those whom she would not slay.

This piece of strategy was successful, for, as Ahdeek came in sight of Clearwater, he saw a rifle drop from her fingers, and she sprung half erect with a low cry of mingled pain and terror.

Had the savages been in the advance, one or two would have fallen.

The Indians were delighted with the success of their plans.

"Clearwater go to woods," said Mossuit, turning suddenly upon Ahdeek, whom they had permitted to kneel beside the couch. "Oagla trains the forest for the traitress, and Mossuit might cross his trail before the light comes."

Ahdeek sprung to his feet with a look of resentment.

"Clearwater is still as weak as the young squirrel," he said "She can not walk a step."

"Then she crawl. She must go into the woods with Mossuit. We can not tarry here. Mossuit has a prisoner in the woods, and he would see him now."

Silver Rifle's heart leaped for joy.

Mossuit's prisoner was the White Tiger!

"Let me carry Clearwater, an' she go," said Ahdeek.

The Indians exchanged glances of horror.

"Ahdeek wants the Chippewas to untie his limbs, that he might run away in the big woods."

"Liars!" was the thunderous response. "Is Ahdeek's word worth nothing? Here, bind Clearwater on my back, an' I'll carry her with my hands still bound. If she leaves this hole in the ground it shall be on my person, not in the arms of an Indian."

The half-breed was at once taken at his words. Clearwater was lifted from her couch, and, with more tenderness than the Indians usually exhibit to an enemy, lashed to her lover's back.

A minute later the entire party were crawling through the gloomy passage again, and at length gained the forest above the lake.

Several hours had passed since the first combat in the cave, and the position of several stars told that it was near midnight.

From the lake came the hoarse mutterings of a storm, and the savages quickened their steps as they entered the city of ghostly trees.

Ahdeek, with his lovely burden, kept pace with them. He was a strong young fellow, who did not mind his load in the least, and often glanced with a smile at Silver Rifle, who kept at his side.

All at once, at the foot of a knoll, and on the brink of a sluggish forest stream, Mossuit halted. The rest of the party followed his example, and silence fell over all.

Presently the chief imitated the hoot of the little night-owl, and then moved forward.

There was no response to the cry, which was thrice repeated, and at last the chief returned.

"Come; Mossuit show braves something," he said, in a hoarse, excited tone; and the party followed his leading.

Suddenly the chief stooped, and raised a dark object from the ground.

It was a dead Indian whose limbs were still warm.

The savages greeted the spectacle with ejaculations of horror, which increased in number and intensity when a second Chippewa, as dead as the first, was exposed to their view by the chief.

"White Tiger gone!" gasped Mossuit, burning with rage. "Mossuit bring him here from cave, and Indians promised to watch him well. But he too much for 'em. He kill 'em and go!"

And, in the silence of chagrin that followed, Silver Rifle uttered an inaudible "Thank heaven," and an expression of satisfaction stole over Ahdeek's face.

Several minutes were spent in hunting the Destroyer's trail; but Mossuit could spare no warriors to pursue, and reluctantly turned away.

"We hunt him when three captives safe," he said. "We cut his heart out, an' make him eat it—the base white dog. Now, braves—"

He paused abruptly, for a cry, similar to the one which he had just repeated, floated through the forest, and after a brief interval the chief replied in a like noise.

Then, for several moments, a conversation was carried on by meads of bird-calls, and at last footsteps came from a certain quarter of the black wood.

Mossuit turned to his warriors, with an announcement that Oagla and his trail-hunters were approaching.

The meeting of the bands was unexpected, but quite cordial, and when Oagla recognized the captives, he started forward, with a cry of joy, and grasped Mossuit's hand again.

"They escape no more!" he said. "Now Hondurah can rid the Chippewas of a traitress."

Mossuit shook his head.

"Hondurah is on his last trail," he said.

"On the trail which leads to the happy hunting-grounds?" Mossuit nodded.

"Who sent him thither?"

"Either Silver Rifle or the White Tiger!"

In the terrible suspense of calm that followed, Oagla turned upon our heroine.

"Who shot Hondurah?"

"Silver Rifle."

A cry of rage burst from the red band, and the next moment a lithe young warrior leaped to Oagla's side.

"There is the dog that stole the little talker!" he cried, pointing to Ahdeek. "He has given it to Silver Rifle. Oagla has sworn to make it talk to him. Make it talk now!"

Impulsively the chief stepped toward the girl, and in the light of a fire which several braves had kindled upon the forest meeting, the maiden shrunk back with blanched cheek and flashing eyes.

"Girl, give Oagla little talker!" demanded the chief.

"Unbind my hands, that I may do it," was the reply. "What is it to Silver Rifle now? 'Tis near a spot which the Indian's hand must not touch; but Silver Rifle will give it to him when she is free."

Oagla smiled faintly, drew his knife, and, before Mossuit could interpose to prevent him, severed the girl's bonds.

"Silver Rifle is Mossuit's captive," said that red worthy, stepping before Oagla.

"Oagla is a chief; Mossuit little more than a brave!" was the angry response, as the speaker, disdaining further words with his questioner, turned to the girl again.

"Give Oagla the little talker," was the demand. "His blood's hot now."

Silver Rifle drew back an inch as the big Indian, with outstretched hand, stepped toward her as though he would crush her; but the next moment she leaped forward, and held his knife in her right hand.

Mossuit and his band applauded the lightning action, and, thus goaded to further madness, Oagla darted upon the girl!

Then Mossuit leaped forward and flung the giant aside.

"If Oagla wants blood—"

Mossuit was sent reeling from the giant, with whom he could not cope, and the challenge was broken.

Nor was it ever renewed, for in the second that followed, Oagla sprung upon the girl again, and staggered back with a crimson spot on the bosom of his hunting-frock.

And from the point of the knife which Silver Rifle griped, fresh, warm blood dropped and stained the leaves at her feet!

"I'll defend the little talker to the death!" she cried, facing

the savages, whose tomahawks shone and clashed scarce five feet away. "I have but paid Oagla for his indignity of other days. I scorn to fly now. I am the prisoner of Mossuit, and the Oaglan brave who touches me receives the blade damp with the blood of his chief!"

The avenging warriors shrunk from her flashing eyes, and the tableau was broken by Mossuit himself, who sprung into the gap, and declared that the path to Silver Rifle led over his dead body!"

Sullen, but not silent, the braves eyed the chief whose wiles had encompassed Hondurah's death; but not a movement was made, until the report of a rifle, discharged not thirty yards away, startled every one.

Silver Rifle reeled and fell into the arms of her red companion!"

If she was dead, it was murder most foul!

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO SCENES IN A TREE TOP.

IT is, perhaps, necessary that the fate of Doc Cromer should be told here, and some mention made of Dorsey Webb, whose disappearance so excited Mossuit and his braves.

The trader found himself in the midst of the wild dogs, after dispatching their ferocious leader.

They sprung at him with the fury of famished wolves, and he struck right and left with deadly effect, until the sharp teeth pulled him to earth, and then, unable to resist any longer, he gave himself up for lost.

But at this juncture the sound of human yells rose above the yelps of the dogs, and a moment later a volley was poured indiscriminately into their ranks. With howls of pain the canines recoiled from their victim; then a few more shots sent them howling through the woods.

More dead than alive, Cromer was lifted from the ground by the rescuing Indians, who uttered cries of triumph when they recognized him.

It was plain to them that a man so badly mangled would not live to reach the village, so they decided upon immediate torture.

With one ear gone—the ear afterward picked up on the field of battle by Hondurah—an arm and side lacerated by the sharp teeth and claws of the brutes, and otherwise injured, Doc Cromer was in no condition to fight his executioners; but notwithstanding all this, he staggered to his feet, called for a knife and dared his red foes to mortal combat.

"Doc Cromer kin whip a nation of skunks, yit," he cried. "If ye don't b'lieve it, come at 'im an' try. I don't thank yo a cussid bit for savin' of my life. I'd sooner die among real dogs than counterfeit ones."

He said this in a great measure to irritate his foes. He was suffering unspeakable pain, and forgetting the ring which the blood covered, he hoped that a tomahawk might terminate his existence. But the blow did not come.

After a brief consultation two Indians ascended a tree and lowered a rude rope, which was fastened about the trader's body. Then he was drawn up among the branches, until he was near fifty feet above *terra firma*.

"Injuns leave trader here now," said one of the braves, as they lashed him to the limbs. "By 'm by big birds come and pick holes in his body. Trader 'feared to die?"

"Not much," was the response. "Men hez to peg out some time, and my time ar' hyar now."

He would speak no more; he left the taunts of the savages unanswered, until, while tying his feet, one shot in his face an epithet that sent the hot blood to the remotest recesses of his brain.

"That's more 'n humanity kin stand!" he hissed, "so, dog, take that!"

With the last word, he tore one foot from the fastenings, but half secured, and furiously, mercilessly hurled his insulter from the limb.

Down, down shot the unfortunate brave, wildly clutching at the boughs, until he struck a root in the midst of his companions below, quivered once, then died—neck-broken!

The remaining Indian in the tree rose before the trader, with a yell of vengeance.

He struck the gory head with his tomahawk, and in less than a minute afterward, had torn the scalp away and was descending!

He encountered half a dozen braves climbing up to butcher the slayer of their brother; but the scalper told them that he was already dead, and they rejoined their companions.

Then the band moved away, leaving the trader lashed to a tree-top, scalped and bleeding.

It rained before day, and amid the darkness of the storm Doc Cromer opened his eyes, he thought, in another world.

He was burning with fever, and tried to quench his thirst with the rain that dropped from the black clouds.

"My God, shall I perish here with the ring that contains the mystery of a life?" he groaned. "Oh, if I could but slip it from my finger and drop it down to the ground."

But this he could not do, for his arms were not free, and so he lay through the night and the day that followed.

The buzzards saw him and descended until they perceived that life was not extinct. Then they would fly away, wait awhile, and return.

Terrible was that day, and the trader hailed the approach of night. He began to hope now—to hope against hope, because he had not perished during the day; but when the stillness of death settled over the wood, he thought he would cease to endure the suspense, and yield up the ghost.

It might have been midnight—he thought it was—when he became aware that something was climbing the tree.

Now, he thought, the death for which he had oftentimes prayed during the last twenty-four hours was near, and the ring—he did not want to think about the bauble, which seemed to be the death of every person into whose hands it fell.

At first he thought the climber a bear; but he soon discovered that it was a human being.

How eagerly he bent forward to catch a glimpse of the intruder, in the beautiful moonlight that streamed through the sparse branches overhead.

At length he remarked the outlines of his visitor—an Indian, probably one of the band which had placed him in the tree; but what had brought the savage back to his victim?

The new-comer drew himself up on a limb just below the trader, and then started back with an ejaculation of horror.

Doc Cromer recognized the tone.

"Ahdeek's ghost!" he gasped.

The climber, reassured, approached again.

"Ahdeek no ghost," he said. "He stop by foot of tree to rest, and heard trader groan. Then he climb up to see who in tree-top."

"'Tis old Doc Cromer, boy," was the feeble reply. "He on his last trail. They've took the scalp that was gettin' white with honorable hairs, an' it's too much for him."

"No, no, Ahdeek save trader; cut him loose an' take him down."

"I tell ye it's too late, boy. I'm goin' to peg out right in this tree. Whar's my right ear? Them infernal dogs chawed it up. What tore my arms? Them sneakin' Injun wolf-hounds. But I finished 'bout ten ov 'em afore the Injuns took me off. Now, Ahdeek, look hyar."

The half-breed bent nearer, but reluctantly, as though he knew what was coming.

"Ahdeek, thar's a ring on my hand."

The Tiger sprung at the member, and uttered a cry of delight when he discovered the bauble.

"No, don't take it off, chief. Listen to me. I swore that that hand should give the gal her ring, an' by hoky! it must do it. So you'll cut my hand off, won't you, boy, and give it her thus?"

With manifest reluctance the young half-breed promised.

"Sech promises won't do Doc Cromer," said the trader. "I want to hear you swear it, and see the hand come off now."

"Trader not dead yet," said the horror-stricken half-breed.

"No difference. Take that hand off at the wrist, and swear that you will give it, with the ring, to Silver Rifle. Do this, Ahdeek, or by heaven! I'll come back from Manitou land, and haunt you till you die."

Thus terribly threatened, the superstitious Ahdeek drew his knife, and amputated the hand of the trader, who watched the proceeding with a grim, triumphant smile.

"Now I know you'll do the balance, boy," he said. "'Tis

lucky that the red villains didn't see the ring. Now, Ahdeek, tell me something before I die. Tell me whose death you've been avenging."

The half-breed hesitated.

The threat of haunting came again.

"The old trader in Watchmenetoc glen."

"Why, he died three years ago."

"Yes."

"What was he to you?"

"He was Ahdeek's father."

"Your real father?"

The half-breed hesitated again.

"Tell me if that old man was your real father, and the secret of the ring—for you know it. Don't lie to me now, boy, for in your sleep, in the cave, you told me that you knew the secret of the ring. Now tell me."

"Will the trader die then?"

"Yes."

"Then Silver Rifle is—," the half-breed paused, for the trader's head fell heavily on his breast, and lay there still.

Ahdeek raised it, but the meaningless stare in the eyes told him that Doc Cromer was dead, beyond peradventure.

The youth sat in the tree-top for an hour before he stirred a limb. Then upon the dead breast he made the cross which the Jesuits had preached to his Indian brethren, and slowly descended.

The hand, with its treasure, reposed in his medicine-bag, and he assured himself of its safety many times as he hurried from the ghastly tree.

The White Tiger was not knocked wholly insensible in the cave by Mossuit; but he perfectly simulated insensibility, while the savage ran with him through the forest.

Soon, however, the chief encountered the same band which had disposed of Doc Cromer, and the youth, apparently still unconscious, was left under the charge of two warriors while Mossuit returned to the cave with the remainder of the new band.

The boy heard their steps die away in the distance, and in silence nerved himself for a hazardous task. On account of

his seeming unconsciousness he was not securely bound, and at an hour when the two guards, seated on the ground, thought not of an attack, he sprung erect and felled one with a club which fortunately lay at his hand.

The second savage rose, but was met with his comrade's gun, which crushed his head and placed him forever *hors du combat*. Then two scalps were torn away, and the double cross of the White Tiger marred the foreheads of the fallen braves.

"Now for the cave," murmured the victor. "The red fellows shall pay dearly for this night's work."

He saw the flash of the four Indian guns on the cliff, heard the battle between his friends and the savages in the mouth of the caye, but knew that he could not help them.

He saw Mossuit emerge with his captives, and followed the band, though at a respectful distance.

The death of Oagla was accomplished before the youth's eyes, and while Mossuit faced the mad braves, and dared them to advance upon Silver Rifle, he heard the clicking of a rifle-lock.

It emanated from a spot not far away, where a footstep, which he had thought belonged to some animal, had died; but now he knew that the prowler was a man.

"Surely the Indian does not know aught of my presence," he muttered, "for I was here before he came to yon tree. However, we will soon see for whose heart he cocked his rifle."

He tried to see the body of the foe, and once or twice, believing that the savage saw him, he drew up to shoot, trusting to luck but lowered the weapon, undetermined how to act.

All at once a sharp report rent the air, and the youth saw Silver Rifle fall, as witnessed in the last chapter.

He could scarcely repress a cry of horror, for the unseen Indian was the slayer.

"Curse me for not shooting!" he hissed. "I might have dropped the fiend, and then—"

The savage, flying from his crime, was bounding toward him!

White Tiger's heart took a great leap for exultation, and a

moment later, with the butt of his rifle, he scattered the young brave's brains far and wide!

"Oh, heaven, does Silver Rifle live?" he cried, starting impulsively toward the group about the fire. "That I have learned to love her, must she be snatched from me now?"

He saw Mossuit face the menacing braves, with Silver Rifle hanging heavily on his arm, and then he heard the sub-chief's voice.

"Warriors, I will be obeyed now," cried the young Chippewa. "Hondurah is dead, and Oagla, who should have stepped into his shoes, lies before us. The Chippewas are chiefless. In the council-house we must say who shall be chief in Hondurah's stead. Now turn upon your heels. Back to the council-house; and when we have a chief, the captives shall die."

Without a word the rebellious warriors turned abruptly on their heels, and the march through the forest was resumed.

Mossuit walked erect, with the stricken girl in his arms.

He gloated over the thought that he had conquered Oagla's braves, and was planning his elevation by chicanery to the chief sachemship of the Chippewa nation.

The mind of each was absorbed in dark plots, which smacked of the rifle, knife, tomahawk and stake, nor did they hear the footsteps of the White Tiger, who trailed them through the dim aisles of the forest.

The wood drama was drawing to a close; the curtain was rising on the last acts.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERY DISSOLVED.

"To the woods!" said our hero, calmly, turning to his friends. "There'll be the Old Harry to pay directly. Wildcat has cheated Mossuit out of the chieftainship, and everybody will be after our scalps in a few minutes."

The words were uttered by the young Destroyer. How

came he here at the prison-lodge? Love, and anxiety to save those he loved, had led him to the village, and the dead guards lying on the ground told the means used to reach the prisoners. He had, one by one, by cunning artifice, lured the four men from their posts, and the deadly knife did its work, which the election of a new sachem, in the village, aided, for all the Chippewas were so interested in this important event that the prison-lodge was almost forgotten, and the braves left there to guard it were more interested in the excited doings in the council-chamber than in their allotted task. So the young Destroyer found his hazardous enterprise greatly abetted, and his subtlety and nerve had freed his friends, as we now find them.

They darted for the forest. Ahdeek bore Clearwater in his arms, and Silver Rifle ran by the White Tiger's side. She had really been unharmed by the bullet meant to take her life.

The outskirts of the wood were gained as a pandemonium of yells rent the air. It was the conflict in the village over the new election. Wildcat had by artifice prevailed over the wily Mossuit, and the two factions were at war, under which most fortunate circumstance the fugitives fled on until the shores of the lake were reached. Then the miners' castle was sought, and a large canoe taken from a dark passage leading from the main corridor.

The boat was launched without difficulty, but Ahdeek did not follow his companions to a seat in the craft.

"Come, Ahdeek," said Dorsey Webb, looking with surprise upon the youth's action. "What are you waiting for?"

"Ahdeek can't go with his friends yet," was the reply.

"Why, boy?"

"He must go to Snowbeard's lodge."

"His mind must be wandering," continued the Destroyer to Silver Rifle. "Boy, Snowbeard died with the other traders, and the fiends burned his lodge to the ground."

"Ahdeek go, anyhow. Snowbeard talk from his grave to him. Wait for Ahdeek in the cave where the winds never sleep. He be there to-morrow night."

The next moment the half-breed was gone.

"What can he mean?" queried Silver Rifle, as he vanished.

"He seeks something regarding your history, I think," was the White Tiger's reply. "The man whom we call Snowbeard was an eccentric old trader, with whom Ahdeek spent many hours. He—the boy—used to tell me that the old man had talking-papers which would tell something about a girl, who knew not who she was. Snowbeard was massacred on the same night that witnessed the extermination of the Lake Superior traders, and Ahdeek struck more than one blow of vengeance for the old man."

"Then I pray that he may greet us in the Cave of the Winds. I will suppress my burning curiosity, and not open the ring until he returns."

"Which will be to-morrow night, as he has said, for he is too cunning to endanger us by seeking the cave in daylight."

The voyagers, despite the storm that burst upon the lake soon after Ahdeek's departure, reached the Winds' Cave and felt comparatively safe around a fire in the second chamber.

Let us follow Ahdeek.

He hurried along the coast for several miles, until the hills came to a termination, when he plunged into the wood again.

Soon again he struck the highlands, sparsely covered with trees, and at last reached a line of bare cliffs, some of which stretched their long, rough arms over the Stygian water, irritated by the storm.

On one of these cliffs Ahdeek found the ruins of a cabin, and soon stood in the midst of half-burned logs. One corner of the hut had escaped the ravages of the savage torch, and into this the half-breed suddenly dropped upon his knees.

"This is the place where Snowbeard hide talking papers," he said in a whisper, and pretty soon he was digging in the dark earth with his tomahawk.

He worked assiduously for several minutes, when his hatchet struck a substance which could not be earth, and an ejaculation of joy parted his lips. Then he ceased to dig, scooped up the loose dirt from the cavity with joined hands, and drew forth a box covered with tanned deer-skin.

"Ahdeek no take box," he said, prying the lid up with his knife. "He want talking-papers, that all."

The lid soon yielded, and he drew a small bundle of damp parchment from the box.

"Snowbeard talk after he dead," said the young half-breed, thrusting the papers into his medicine-pouch. "Now he go back to friends, and Silver Rifle know all 'bout yellow money."

He carefully replaced the box in the hole, and rose to his feet, as, with a sharp cry of triumph, an Indian leaped upon him!

The half-breed went to the ground beneath the onslaught, but a moment later the savage rolled from him with a death-groan. The knife of Ahdeek had done its work.

He sprung to his feet to confront three new foes, who threw themselves upon him with the fury of tigers.

His knife stretched one Indian dead upon the plain, and he hurled another into the water, then closed with the last.

All at once the madmen paused for breathing time.

"Ahdeek find papers that talk 'bout gold," said the Indian. "Little Fox heard Snowbeard tell Ahdeek 'bout 'um by his fire last winter. Little Fox mus' have talking-papers."

"Little Fox wasn't born to hear Snowbeard's papers talk," replied Ahdeek, calmly, and then they went at it again.

For several minutes they struggled, when suddenly, by a wrench, Little Fox secured the medicine-pouch and disengaged himself from his foe. Then, with a yell of triumph, he stepped back for a spring, by which he hoped to make his escape. But Ahdeek disconcerted him by following him up, and suddenly a yell of terror broke from his lips. He was tottering on the verge of the cliff! He tried to regain his equilibrium, and Ahdeek essayed to snatch him from his doom, but he fell backward, and left Ahdeek empty-handed.

"Talking-papers gone!" he shrieked. "No! no! Ahdeek get them again or die!" and as he spoke, he, too, sprung into the darkness, down into the stormy waves of Gitche Gumee!

Landing safely in the deep water, Ahdeek listened, with his feet on a rock near the shore. Suddenly something struck his body, and turning quickly he caught it in his arms. It was Little Fox, who had been, for a short time, stunned by the fall, but who now again grappled with his foe.

But the struggle was brief. The half-breed's hand closed on the Indian's throat, and soon Ahdeek heard the death-gurgle.

Then he felt for the medicine-pouch, but it was gone!

He uttered a cry of despair, when something light struck his thigh.

"The pouch!" he shouted, clutching after the object.

His fingers touched the beaded fringe of the bag; but before he could grab again, a wave bore it from him!

"I wonder why Ahdeek does not come!" said Silver Rifle to the young Destroyer, on the night that followed their arrival in the Cave of the Winds.

"Something must have gone wrong," was the reply. "He said he would be here, and if he lives, he surely would not tarry longer than this night. Girl, if you but knew how I love that boy! And if the red hounds have killed him, by heavens! I'll resume the trail of vengeance, and for every drop of his blood shall flow a crimson river from the Chippewas' hearts!"

The youth rose to his feet as he paused, and for the fiftieth time that night stepped toward the mouth of the cave to listen for the half-breed. He had taken but two strides when something, hurled from the gloom, fell at his feet.

He started back with ready rifle, and saw that the object was an Indian, freshly slain and scalped.

The youth was bewildered, and before he could recover, a figure darted forward.

He recognized it with a joyous cry of "Ahdeek!"

Silver Rifle started to her feet, and Clearwater rose from the couch, and echoed the name of her lover.

"Ahdeek just in time," said the youth, pointing to the dead Indian. "Red spy find Cave of Winds, and his rifle was aimed at Nahma, when Ahdeek leaped upon him like the panther, and his life went out over the waters of Gitche Gumee to the other land."

"But, Ahdeek, think you he was the only savage hereabouts?" questioned the White Tiger, anxiously.

"Yes, he was alone. Ahdeek come back sooner, but Indians catch him on the cliff; he fight 'em all; lost medicine-pouch in Gitche Gumee; but rock catch it for him, and—here, Silver Rifle, talking-papers."

The Girl Trailer sprung eagerly forward and clutched the roll of damp paper which the half-breed extended.

"Now I shall know all!" she cried, turning to the fire, and filled with curiosity, the two gathered around her.

Ahdeek shook with emotion, and kept his large, lustrous eyes, half-filled with tears, fixed intently upon her.

"The ring first, Silver Rifle," he suggested, in a tremulous tone, and the girl laid the papers aside.

The ring had been taken from the dead hand of the brave but ill-fated Doc Cromer, and the member buried amid the water rocks of the lake.

She soon discovered that the large jewel of the ring could be removed, and in a short time she had accomplished this and held a small fold of paper.

Her fingers shook while she unfolded it, and the trio watched with bated breath.

Suddenly the girl looked up and fastened her eyes upon Ahdeek.

He rose to his feet.

"My brother!" cried Silver Rifle, stepping toward him with outstretched hands. "I own you, brave boy; a nobler brother than Ahdeek I would not wish to own!"

"Ahdeek Silver Rifle's brother," said the young Avenger, drawing the girl to his heart. "His mother sleeps in the forest; Silver Rifle's among the white man's lodges."

For a moment silence reigned in the cave.

"The mystery of my life is solved," she said, turning to Dorsey Webb, who had not yet recovered from this unexpected *denouement*. "My father was the trader whose death my brother here has avenged. He came to these shores when I estranged him and mother, long ago. I was born after his departure; so I never saw his face. But he tells me all—who I am, what I am. In his seclusion he wedded a chief's daughter, who gave him a son—Ahdeek—then died. I am of noble blood; father tells me so. Oh Heaven, I thank thee that I have not hunted in vain for the ring. It has told the story that sealed mother's lips. Now, Ahdeek, the papers!"

She unrolled the wet papers, and all present bent over them to decipher, if possible, the strange diagrams traced upon them.

"They tell of wealth," said the White Tiger. "Ahdeek, where is this cliff marked here? I never saw it."

The half-breed looked carefully at the diagram, and after deep thought, started to his feet.

"Cliff right 'bove us!" he cried, as he snatched a torch from the fire.

All was plain to the half-breed now; the cliff beneath which the old trader's wealth was deposited stood above them; the hiding-place was the Cave of the Winds, not named, merely marked, on the rude map.

The interior of the cave was rudely but thoroughly traced on the parchment, and at last Ahdeek suddenly dropped the torch, and began to disturb the stony earth with his tomahawk.

He struck the right spot, and presently the trader's earnings during seventeen years of highly successful toiling rewarded their labors.

The quartette started back with exclamations of wonderment at the heap of coin.

"If I could reward you with this heap, willingly would I do it," said Silver Rifle, turning to the young Destroyer. "To your bravery I owe the happy thoughts of this hour."

"Girl, I do claim a reward," and Dorsey Webb took her hand. "This," and he raised the *petite* member to his lips, "this, Silver Rifle, is the reward I claim but I ask too much."

Then the beautiful eyes dropped to the ground, and after long silence, the lips murmured:

"If this hand can reward thee, White Tiger, it is thine!"

He drew her to his heart in the ecstasy of his joy.

"Ahdeek ask Clearwater long ago," said the half-breed at this juncture. "He take her beyond Gitche Gumee now."

"Yes, Ahdeek, Clearwater is my sister," and Silver Rifle—Marie Knight—embraced the Indian Girl. "The light has broken at last."

"No, not yet," shouted the half-breed, suddenly throwing himself before the girls. "The red dogs come once more!"

His rifle flashed as he spoke, and a savage staggered forward in the agonies of death.

Then the cave resounded with wild yells, and the parties closed in the final combat.

The battle raged for many minutes, but the hunted ones

fought with a fury that had never nerved their arms before, and, at last, they stood over the victorious ground.

Rigid in death lay Mossuit, and Silver Rifle bent tenderly over him.

"He saved my life once," she said, pushing aside the scalp-lock that shaded the stony face. "Peace to his ashes."

A wounded savage told the victors that Mossuit had overcome Wildcat, and, with a few of his braves, had trailed them to the cave. The Indian whom Ahdeek slew when returning with the "talking-papers," was Mossuit's spy, and after waiting beyond patience for his return, the chief and his warriors sought the foe themselves.

"Our last battle has been fought," said Dorsey Webb. "How I wish Cromer could share this hour with us."

But such wishes were vain ones, for Doc Cromer had taken his last scalp, and peacefully slept in the top of a tree.

Luther Knight, Silver Rifle's father, before confiding the ring to Ahdeek, told him who he was, and made him swear that after three years of vengeance he would seek out his daughter and surrender to her the talking bauble. And Ahdeek had confided the maps to Snowbeard.

It had passed through its last adventure. It had proved to more than one person—indeed, it seemed death to possess it.

Dohma, waking from his trance in the grove in Silver Rifle's cave, allured by the glitter of its diamond, stole it from the shelf whereon Ahdeek had placed it until he could find the Girl Trailer, and carried it to the spot where he was choked to death, by the ill-fated trader.

"At last! at last!" cried our friends, one evening, several days after the last battle, as they came in sight of a strong French settlement on the lake shore.

Well might they shout for joy, for the dangers of the wilderness were passed.

"The White Tigers have buried the hatchet forever. Henceforward yonder woods echo no more to their tread. The Chippewa will see their crosses on the trees, but he shall not shudder as of yore."

Dorsey Webb was the speaker, and he stood in the gloaming of an August day, pointing to the lodge of the Chippewa.

"The Past can never return, thank Heaven!" responded the beautiful creature at his side. "The name of White Tiger has lost itself in that of Dorsey Webb, and the wild cognomen of Silver Rifle in the softer one of—"

"Wife!"

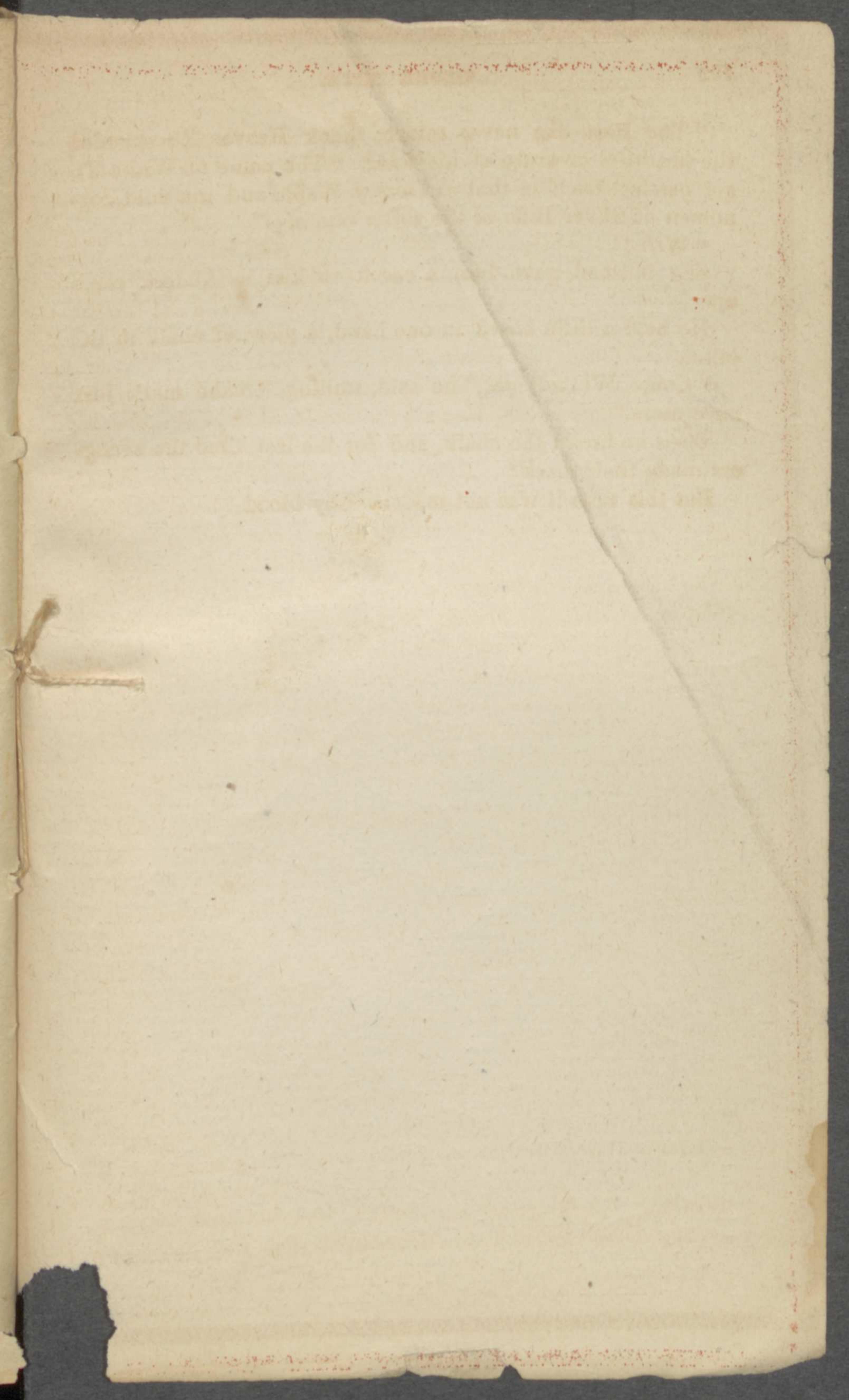
She blushed, gave him a cheek to kiss, as Ahdeek came up.

He held a little board in one hand, a piece of chalk in the other.

"Come, White Tiger," he said, smiling, "make mark just once more."

Then he broke the chalk, and for the last time the avengers made their mark!

But this time it was not made red by blood



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